

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OF ADULT LEARNERS

Robert Dobmeier
Adjunct Professor
Educational Foundations Department
Buffalo State College

Joseph Moran
Professor Emeritus
Educational Foundations Department
Buffalo State College

Abstract

The adult education literature on disruptive behavior of adult learners was reviewed and a survey on disruptive behavior of adult learners was conducted with adult educators. The findings are synthesized in a conceptual framework for understanding the types and causes of disruptive behavior, which fall into the categories of inattention, acting-out, and threatening/harmful/violent. Factors that may contribute to disruptive behavior are the presence of a disability; history of an impoverished social background and/or of exposure to personal violence; personal stressors such as child care and job demands; and, in the learning environment, inadequate instruction, disconnection with the instructor and/or other learners, and ineffective intervention by the instructor. A set of guidelines is offered for preventing and managing disruptive behavior. It is further recommended that research be directed toward identifying interventions that are effective with specific adult education populations and how to train adult educators to deal with disruptive behavior.

There has been growing concern over disruptive behavior, including violence in educational and work settings, in the last decade. Adult educators have had to face the challenges of disruptive behavior by adult learners in the classroom and in other learning settings. Increasingly, there is the need for the adult education field to address this problem so that effective prevention and intervention strategies can be identified and presented to adult education practitioners in the field and to preservice educators in training. An exploratory review of the adult education literature was conducted to determine the nature, causes, prevention, and management of disruptive behavior in learning environments. Secondly, a survey was conducted with preservice adult educators at a college in New York State to elicit their views and experiences of disruption in the classroom and other learning environments.

Background of the Problem

In April 2007, a 23 year-old English major at Virginia Tech, Seung-Hui Cho, killed 32 fellow students and faculty on campus by gunfire (Cable News Network, 2007). He had been diagnosed with a mental illness (Cable News Network, 2007). In September 2006, a 25 year-old

gunman went on a shooting rampage at Dawson Community College in Montreal killing a 19 year-old female student and injuring 19 others. The man was killed in a shootout with the police. On his Goth culture website he had written, “Work sucks... School sucks... Life sucks...” (CBS News, 2006, para. 4 and Gunman Said He Was ‘Ready for Action’ section, para. 4). In August 2000, a student at the University of Arkansas, who had just been evicted from a graduate program, bought a box of bullets less than an hour before walking into his advisor's office, shooting him three times and then killing himself (Cable News Network, 2000).

Adrian-Taylor, Noels, and Tischler (2007) report that destructive conflict emerges too often in graduate student and faculty supervisor relationships resulting from lack of openness, time restrictions, negative feedback, unclear expectations, and limited use of the English language. Rice (2001) in a dissertation on violence in higher education recommends that campuses establish a violence prevention policy that addresses what actions will not be tolerated, the disciplinary action that will be taken in response to violence and disruption, what to report, and to whom to report it. Colleges and universities have begun providing guidelines to their faculties for dealing with disruptive classroom behaviors (Common Disruptive Classroom Behavior, 2007). Since the Virginia Tech shootings in April 2007 higher education institutions across the nation have created or updated emergency management policies, purchased alert systems, sought ways to balance campus safety with privacy, and debated the pros and cons of allowing guns in school settings (USA Today, 2007).

Adult educators work not only in school settings but also as trainers in the workplace. For 2006, the United States Department of Labor reported that 13.2% of 5,703 fatal occupational injuries were the result of assaults and violent acts (Fatal Occupational Injuries by Event or Exposure, 2006). In April 2007, following a poor performance review a NASA contractor shot a co-worker and took another employee hostage before he took his own life (Cable News Network, 2007). In July 2003, an employee at Lockheed Aircraft plant in Meridian, Mississippi shot to death six coworkers and wounded eight before killing himself (Halbfinger, 2003). The U.S. Department of Labor (2004) issued guidelines to Health Care and Social Service employers about workplace violence (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004).

Adult Education

In order to achieve clarity of the problem of disruptive behavior among adult learners it will be helpful to revisit briefly the nature of adult education as a field. Understanding the purposes and modalities of adult education should assist to place disruptive behavior and its origins in perspective and to identify strategies for prevention and intervention. Adult education includes the diverse areas of English as a Second Language (ESL); Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Diploma (GED) instruction; credential programs leading to a college or university degree, vocational or technical diploma; apprenticeship programs leading to journeyman status in a skilled trade; work and job training and development, and preparation for a license or certification; and personal development courses such as health improvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Adult education comes in the forms of technical, remedial, liberal and religious studies, and takes place in diverse settings that include the workplace, libraries, community centers, high schools, community colleges, universities, prisons, and health facilities.

Lifelong, recurrent, and continuing education characterize the field of adult education (Lawson, 1985). Education is a process that begins at birth and ends at death (Grace, 2000). Adult education “is an intervention into the ordinary business of life for the purpose of change, knowledge or competence” (Courtney, 1989, p. 24). It is “a process wherein adults alone, in groups, or in institutional settings improve themselves or their society” (Houle, 1972, p. 32). Knowles (1980) views adult education as:

A social movement that encompasses the whole spectrum of mature individuals learning in infinite ways under innumerable auspices the many things that make life richer and more civilized, and is dedicated to the ... extension of opportunities for adults to learn and the advancement of the general level of culture. (p.13)

Adult education is different from the formal education of the past. It has the higher purpose of finding excitement and personal rewards in learning (Davis, 1991). Adult education makes post-secondary education accessible to working adults through nontraditional degree programs (Knowles, 1980). It is the means to address the personal development of individual employees by drawing forth good work habits, vocational interests, and self-awareness (Knowles, 1991).

Brockett (1991) and Bennett deMarrais (1991) view adult education as a means to abolish the inequality in the education process by empowering adults to discover themselves, their community, and the world in which they reside. It provides the opportunity to recognize one’s intelligence and creativity upon which to develop skills in self-expression, critical thinking, and managing power (Wilson Mott, 1991). With the special problems of urban society, adult education is the environment where educators and citizens can work together to find solutions to social problems (Knowles, 1980).

Choice and empowerment of the adult learner seem to be at the heart of what constitutes adult education. How is it, then, that disruptive behavior emerges among adults who are choosing to advance their own learning? To answer this question, the nature of disruptive behavior in adult education settings must be considered.

Conceptual Framework on Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is behavior on the part of a learner that obstructs learning in an adult education setting. As a result of a review of adult education and related professional literature, a conceptual framework of disruptive behavior has been identified. The framework consists of three degrees of behavior: inattentive, acting-out, and threatening/harmful/violent, and four kinds of variables that contribute to the onset of disruptive behavior among adult learners.

Types of Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior presented by adult learners can be viewed as falling into three distinct kinds of behaviors that comprise a continuum.

Inattention. Inattention refers to behavior that interferes with learning due to lack of focus on the learning task at hand. There is no intent to disrupt learning or to offend anyone. The

outcome, nevertheless, is that learning is obstructed for the disruptive learner, and often for other learners. It can also obstruct or undermine the instructional objectives of the teacher. Examples are gazing out the window, sleeping, side conversations with peers, and leaving the classroom. Inattentive behavior is fairly common in adult education settings.

Inattentiveness may be associated with a deficit in behavioral inhibition or self-regulation (Barkley, 1997; Flory, Milich, Lyman, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2003; Weiss & Murray, 2003; Young, Gudjonsson, Ball, & Lam, 2003). Preoccupation with day to day demands such as child care, financial problems, and work schedule can detract from the learner's readiness to focus on the learning task at hand (Blaxter, 1999). A history of exposure to violence, especially for women, can detract from one's psychological readiness to attend to learning activities (Horsman, 2004; Torode, 2001). Cultural influences such as hip-hop, with its emphasis on self-gratification, and poverty, characterized by hopelessness, alienation, and paucity of resources, can undermine an adult learner's readiness to focus on academic work (Dill, 1997; Guy, 2004; Kappel & Daley, 2004). Adults forced to participate in training where little value is perceived by the learner may find it difficult to attend to learning materials and activities (O'Grady & Atkin, 2006).

Acting-out. Acting-out behavior refers to breaking rules and offending others. It takes its name from the sense that the person is expressing negative feelings, such as frustration or anger, through an overt action. Examples are expressing anger at being forced to attend training by arriving late, taking cell phone calls, pretending to yawn while answering a question, refusing to participate, and stating that the learning activities are ineffective. Acting out behavior is intended to disrupt the teaching-learning process for the teacher, for peers, and for the disruptive learner. Blaxter (1999) included among these intentional behaviors designed to express negative feelings missing classes and dropping out of a course or program. Other common forms of acting-out are reading a newspaper, using a classroom to speak about one's favorite subjects, talking when the teacher is talking, walking in and out of the room, making sarcastic comments, and frequently disputing the instructor's statements.

Everyone is vulnerable to acting-out negative emotions when they are experiencing stress and learners may act-out in learning activities because they are among the few places where they can act out without severe consequences. Blaxter (1999) suggests that stress from demands related to childcare, finances, transportation, health, personal safety, and job performance may lead to acting-out.

Adults who have a history of a learning difficulty (e.g., a diagnosable reading disability) may find many learning activities stressful (Jordan, 2000). Whether those learning difficulties are developmental such as an attention deficit or a reading disability, environmental such as trying to compete throughout childhood with a talented sibling, or something entirely different, they may leave adult learners at risk for acting-out in learning situations. Jordan (2000) believes that a significant proportion of the learners who display chronic acting-out may have a social learning disability that handicaps their attempts to learn appropriate social behaviors and to modify inappropriate behaviors. Jordan's position is that some learners are developmentally predisposed toward oppositional behavior and to escalating their misbehavior when they are confronted. Hughes (2000) offers the intriguing concept that although acting-out is frequently associated with males, female learners may engage in a variant form of acting-out behavior that teachers do

not recognize as acting out because it is not overtly disruptive. She suggests that female students who feel oppressed may resist dialogue, participation, and cooperation in the classroom. Some female learners may have a tendency to deny the actuality of gender oppression, especially when it occurs in a setting dominated by male values. Clashes of gender-related values may account for overt or covert acting-out by men or women. Adult educators need skills to identify acting-out behaviors, to understand the possible causes for acting-out in a given situation, and to implement classroom management strategies that are appropriate to a given situation.

An important alternative view of acting-out behavior is that resistance, conflict, and disruptive behavior may be elicited by the relationships that a learner encounters in the learning setting with the teacher and other students. They may be provoked by the perceived irrelevance of the learning objectives to a learner's career goals, as well as by inept instruction. Similarly, they may be provoked when a learner feels stifled in exercising creativity and/or critical thinking. A learning environment where the teacher perceives genuine inquiry as out-of-bounds can elicit inattentiveness, acting-out, and even threatening behavior (Embry, 1997; Martin, 2006).

Threatening /harmful/violent behavior. Threatening/harmful/violent behavior is intended to do or to suggest physical harm to another learner, an instructor, or to property. It includes violent behavior. It also includes behavior intended to inflict physical and/or psychological harm. Examples are swearing in the classroom, fighting with a peer, pushing a teacher, or threatening to do the same. Harassment of teachers reveals the wide range of disruptive behavior that teachers may face on the job (Martin, 2006). Workplace violence is described as:

Written, verbal or physical threat of harm, physically touching another in a way that is unwelcome, intent to cause distress or injury, approaching or threatening another with a weapon, and causing or attempting to cause injury or intimidation to another person. (Violence in the Workplace, 2007, para.1)

The following report from a teacher in a survey on sexual harassment of college instructors illustrates a form of threatening and harmful behavior

During exam week he came to my office, which was deserted except for us. He demanded to know why he had a B+ for the course. We went back and forth for nearly an hour... He said, 'Well, why is it that in my other classes (math and science related courses) I'm getting Cs and Ds but I'm not angry with those instructors?' As he was leaving the student said, 'one of these days I'm going to come back and I'm going to kill you.' (Examples of Student-to-Teacher Harassment in the Traditional Classroom, 2007, para. 1)

Such aggressive behavior in adults may be a manifestation of impaired impulse control and/or longstanding high levels of hostility, sometimes exacerbated by substance abuse. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (1993), these problems are likely to stem from developmental and/or environmental factors. For example, adults and youths who exhibit antisocial behaviors may have a history of school performance problems, poor relationships with adults and peers, abusive care by their families, and family members who had psychiatric and/or substance abuse disorders.

Aggressive behavior manifested as acting-out or as threatening behavior in the learning setting can result from a learner feeling slighted, ignored, or humiliated by the instructor or by another learner. In fact, studies that have investigated the nature of aggressive behavior among college students have documented that individuals who feel that their self-esteem has been threatened may retaliate (Werner & Crick, 1999).

Werner and Crick (1999) contrasted overt aggression such as hitting, pushing, verbal threats, and bullying with relational aggression manifested in spreading rumors about peers and excluding peers from activities. Although they did not specifically associate overt aggression with men and relational aggression with women, they did find that female college students were more likely to engage in relational aggression if they had psychological difficulties such as depression, bulimic symptoms, antisocial personality features, affective instability, egocentricity, identity disturbance, poor anger management, or impulsivity. Bettencourt and Miller (1996) stated that males tend to become verbally or physically threatening and that females frequently resort to relational aggression.

While it is helpful to recognize inattention, acting out, and threatening behavior as different types of disruptiveness that are distinguished by the degree of seriousness and intentionality on the part of the learner, in actuality they may reflect a continuum of failure to adapt to the learning environment. Inattentive behavior may escalate to acting-out and acting-out may escalate to threatening, harmful, or violent behavior depending on the vulnerabilities of the learner, the skill of the teacher to respond, and the specifics of the situation. The concept of disruptive behavior as a continuum will be addressed further in considering its implications for prevention and intervention strategies.

Etiology of Disruptive Behaviors

It appears that there are four kinds of variables that contribute to the onset of disruptive behavior among adult learners. First, having a disability may be associated with disruptive behavior. Psychiatric and substance abuse disorders, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disorders, traumatic brain injury and other forms of cognitive impairment, may be associated with inattentive, acting-out, or threatening behavior for a host of neurological and psychosocial reasons. Second, some adult learners whose social backgrounds have allowed limited opportunity for the development of social skills may be at an increased risk to behave in a disruptive manner. In some instances, exposure to personal violence may be associated with a lack of psychological readiness for learning. Third, stressors from managing multiple roles such as job, finances, child care, relationships, or transportation may contribute to the onset of disruptive behavior. Finally, the potential for any learner to become disruptive may increase due to variables in the learning environment such as mandatory participation, unclear learning objectives, disconnection from others, or poor quality of teaching.

Psychiatric disability, substance abuse, and disruptive behavior. Different kinds of disabilities may be associated with the onset of disruptive behavior. This may result from the impact of the disability on mental functioning or the emergence of negative emotions in coping with a disability. Furthermore, the learner's social background, having to manage multiple roles,

or an ineffective learning environment may interact with a disability or may be present independently, which result in the onset of disruptive behavior.

Poor judgment and limited impulse control associated with a psychiatric or substance abuse disorder may lead to inattentive, acting-out, or threatening behavior. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revised (DSM-IV-TR; 2000) classifies adult psychiatric disorders, any of which an adult learner may present within an adult education setting. A thought disorder, such as schizophrenia, is characterized by hallucinations, delusional thinking, poor judgment, and social alienation. A learner facing a thought disorder may misinterpret the behavior of an instructor or of fellow students and become inappropriately defensive and angry, leading to acting-out or threatening behavior (What is a Mental Health Difficulty? Categories of Mental Health Difficulties, 2007). An individual with a bipolar disorder who is in a manic phase may exhibit grandiosity and poor judgment and may disregard rules, norms, and social etiquette. An adult facing a mood disorder of depression or anxiety may be inattentive to the demands of the learning environment due to preoccupation with their psychic discomfort (Glass, McKnight, & Valdimarsdottir, 1993).

Personality disorders reflect a pattern of pathological behavior in learning, work, social, and home environments (Young, Gudjonsson, Ball, & Lam, 2003). The antisocial personality is unable to empathize with the legitimate needs of others and is driven to satisfy selfish needs by attempts to manipulate others through acting-out and threatening behavior. The explosive personality erupts in hostility and anger, at times becoming threatening or physically aggressive toward others. The avoidant personality is disconnected socially and may be unable to keep up with the learning environment's demand for social interaction and cooperation, resulting in a lack of attention to the learning task at hand.

Alcohol or drug abuse/dependence can present serious obstacles to learning (Flory et al., 2003; The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1993). Addictive behavior, frequently accompanied by poor judgment, limited impulse control, and inappropriate social behavior, can result in inattentiveness, acting out, or threatening behavior in the learning setting.

Four points need to be addressed regarding use of the DSM-IV-TR (2000) to interpret disruptive behavior of adult learners. First, the diagnostic categories are not precise, mutually exclusive, or exhaustive (Morrison, 1995). Similarly, psychiatric disorders are not all or nothing phenomena. Some people may consistently display one or more features of a disorder but never display the frequency or intensity of the associated problem behaviors to meet all the DSM-IV-TR (2000) criteria necessary for a diagnosis. Other individuals may manifest features of two or more disorders simultaneously. Second, a diagnosis is not permanent. An individual may be diagnosable at one or more points in one's life, but not at others. Third, this system of categorizing problematic behavior is not based on a single theory of causes or treatments for problematic behavior, but on the principle that all behavior is likely to have multiple causes and should be viewed from multiple perspectives. Fourth, although adult educators are not qualified to diagnose psychiatric disorders, they can profit from thinking about all learners on a continuum from undeveloped to well developed for each of the abilities associated with these disorders (i.e., ability to attend, to moderate emotions, and to empathize). They will, thereby, stay within their roles as educators while being mindful of potential psychological sources of disruptive behavior.

Psychiatric and substance abuse disorders can be associated with inattention, acting-out, or threatening behavior and can be manifested in the behavior of adult learners in any of the six areas of adult education identified earlier.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The DSM-IV-TR (2000) identifies Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as inattentiveness, referring to being easily distracted and unable to sustain listening. It is associated with having difficulty completing tasks and speaking out without thinking (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). The inattentiveness may or may not be accompanied by hyperactivity, which is manifested in having difficulty remaining still and focused.

Weiss and Murray (2003) report that between 2-6% of adults are diagnosable with ADHD and that their behaviors tend to mirror the characteristics of younger people with this disorder: restless, impulsive, disorganized, high energy level, and constant chatter. In addition, they remark that adults with ADHD have high rates of significant educational, reading, occupational, interpersonal, and marital difficulties. Their findings are consistent with the work of other researchers (Barkley 1997; Barkley, Guevremont, Anastopoulos, DuPaul, & Shelton, 1993; Flory et al., 2003; Young et al., 2003). ADHD may be manifested in the behavior of adult learners in any of the six areas of adult education, but may have a higher incidence in Adult Basic Education because of its co-occurrence with learning disabilities, which are frequently associated with performance difficulties in elementary and secondary education.

Learning disabilities. Estimates on the number of adults in the general population with a learning disability vary from 1% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001) to 4.5% (Corley & Taymans, 2007) to 15% (About LD, 2008; Vogel, 1998). White and Polson (1999) in a national survey of Adult Basic Education (ABE) directors discovered that 23.3% of learners participating in Adult Basic Education programs have a learning disability and 12.3% meet diagnostic requirements for mental retardation. Ryan and Price reported that between 10% and 50% of adults in ABE programs are learning disabled (as cited in Corley and Taymans, 2007).

In 1977, the U.S. Office of Education adopted the definition of specific learning disability as “a disorder that affects speaking, listening, reading, writing, spelling, or mathematical calculations... It is not the same as mental retardation or emotional disturbance, and neither is it a result of the effects of sociocultural, economic, or environmental factors” (Hallahan & Mercer as cited in Eastwick Covington, 2004, p. 92). In 1987, the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities clarified that learning disabilities are heterogeneous in nature, reflecting significant difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, mathematical abilities, or social skills. It is assumed that they result from central nervous system dysfunction. While they may co-exist with sensory impairment, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, socio-environmental deprivation, poor instruction, and ADHD, learning disabilities are not caused directly by them (National Institute for Literacy, 1995 as cited in Eastwick Covington, 2004).

Mellard and Scanlon (2006) report problems of tardiness, absenteeism, lack of disciplinary sanctions, tuning out, and dropping out associated with learners in ABE settings, many of whom have a learning disability. Adult learners with the lowest literacy rates have the highest prevalence rates of learning disabilities (Vogel, 1998). Individuals facing a learning

disability frequently find themselves alienated from peers and possibly from the instructor. This may result in acting-out due to feeling rejected and frustrated and may lead to inattentiveness due to lack of social motivation to succeed in the learning environment. In addition, the difficulty of mastering language and numbers can cause frustration that increases the likelihood of inattention, acting out, and even threatening behavior.

Given the high prevalence estimates of learning disabilities among adults it is expected that adults with learning disabilities will participate in all forms of adult education, including colleges and universities. The understanding that learning disabilities are constituted by a significant discrepancy between normal aptitude and lower achievement (Eastwick Covington, 2004) further increases the likelihood that adults with learning disabilities will participate in all forms of adult education.

Traumatic brain injury. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) results from a blow from an external force (e.g., a car or sports accident, a fall, or an act of violence). It may be associated with learning problems, impaired judgment, or poor impulse control, any of which may contribute to the onset of frustration and disruptive behavior. Almost two million adults and children sustain a brain injury each year in the U.S., 70% of which are mild in nature and may go undiagnosed. Symptoms of TBI, whether it is diagnosed or undiagnosed, can last for months and even years (Busch & Alpern, 1998; Falvo, 2005). Adult learners who have had a head injury run the spectrum of the injury occurring in childhood, in adulthood prior to pursuing adult education, or during their participation in adult education.

Problems that may be associated with a traumatic brain injury include difficulty concentrating and remembering, reduced mental processing speed, personality changes, lack of initiative, poor planning, and cognitive inflexibility. Sensory impairment, low energy, and lack of coordination may also be present (Plotts, 2001). Frequently, the cognitive impairments that accompany TBI will create problems attending to the learning task at hand. Frustration related to concentration and memory impairment may result in acting-out. Personality changes may be associated with impaired behavior regulation and impulsivity, resulting in acting-out and even threatening and violent behavior (Feeney, 2001).

Adults who have encountered a TBI or other cognitive impairment during childhood are more likely to show up in remedial areas of adult education such as ABE and GED due to performance problems in elementary and secondary education. They may also be referred to job training programs. Those who have suffered a TBI in adulthood prior to participation in adult education may show up in rehabilitative job training programs. Adults who have experienced a TBI while participating in an adult education program could be involved in any of the six primary areas of adult education, depending on the severity of the injury.

Social background. Not all disruptive behaviors presented by adult learners are associated with having a disability. Variables related to a learner's upbringing and background may affect the likelihood of one's manifesting disruptive behavior. Kappel and Daley (2004), Machura (1997), Dill (1997), and Wright (1991) advocate for adult educators to assist adult learners from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds to transform their belief system from one of failure and despair associated with poverty and violence to one of hope and empowerment. Delgado (2007)

advocates for empowerment of adult learners through social action, thereby diminishing the paralysis of oppression, abuse, and violence.

Torode (2001) states that every adult educator deals with violence in the educational setting because violence is common in American culture. Dill (1997) claims that adult educators need to assist students to understand the impact of personal violence on their capacity to learn in the present. Horsman (2004) asserts that female trauma victims need help from adult educators to express feelings associated with violence to free themselves for learning. Guy (2004) believes that sexism and violence in gansta rap music detracts from the learning impulse of adult learners. O'Grady and Atkin (2006) contrast the symbolic violence sometimes associated with mandated training programs to engaging the worker in self-directed development.

Lack of social skills development related to poverty, personal exposure to violence in childhood or adulthood, and accompanying resentments, may become obstacles to adult learning. These background factors can increase the likelihood of inattentive and acting-out behavior, particularly if they are accompanied by negative influences in the learning environment such as poor teaching or poor fit between course objectives and the individual's career objectives. The adult learner may need assistance to address feeling disconnected in the learning environment due to cultural dissonance. Assistance may also be required to work through feelings and beliefs associated with experiences of neglect, abuse, or trauma.

Background factors that may become a learning challenge for the adult learner and the adult educator may emerge in any area of adult education, but are more likely to occur in college and university settings as adult learners pursue vocational goals. They may also show up more frequently in ABE and GED settings as adult learners strive to improve their educational status. The impact of poverty and violence are also likely to be evident in remedial adult education programs in prison settings.

Managing multiple roles. It is the nature of adult education to work with many learners who are struggling to manage multiple roles of student, parent/family, income, job, and leisure (Blaxter, 1999). This can create stress when the learner is faced with class assignments, deadlines, and academic group work. Under the stress of managing multiple roles, and particularly if there are pre-existing risk factors, the learner may manifest inattention and other forms of disruptive behavior.

The stress of adult learners managing multiple roles is particularly evident in college and university settings as individuals strive to earn a degree in pursuit of a vocational goal. It may also present itself in other areas of adult education as adults seek to assimilate, improve their earning power, earn educational credentials, and pursue personal interests. Adult learners managing multiple roles is a factor that adult educators should consider in seeking to understand the interactive and cumulative causes of inattentive, acting-out, and threatening behavior.

Ineffective learning environment. Even for learners who do not face the previous risk factors, the possibility of disruptive behavior increases if the adult educator or institution has not sufficiently planned and structured the learning activity and environment. Frustration, anxiety,

confusion, and resentment may result for the learner who is faced with a setting where learning goals are unclear or perceived as irrelevant (Pike & Arch, 1997; Weiss & Murray, 2003).

Implications for Prevention and Intervention

Mindful of these four interactive causes of disruptive behavior and the view that disruptive behavior manifests on a continuum of failure to adapt to the learning environment, the following three general prevention and intervention strategies are offered. First, disruptive behavior is likely to persist and/or escalate unless the adult educator intervenes effectively early on. Second, frequently there are synergistic effects among the causal factors that may require simultaneous or consecutive interventions. Third, an adult learner facing multiple risk factors may at times need focused attention from the adult educator to prevent the onset of disruptive behavior.

Some individuals may be relatively immune to risk factors such as job stress and poor teaching. However, someone with a learning, psychiatric, or developmental problem may act-out during poorly run learning activities and may escalate to threaten or harm someone during periods of significant stress. Addressing disruptive behavior without forethought can actually provoke escalation from one level to another. For example, if a learner were inattentive because he or she was preoccupied with a recent confrontation with his supervisor and a teacher was to address the inattention publicly, the confrontation with the teacher could add to the stress to the point where he or she acts out anger toward the teacher. If he or she has a social learning disability (Jordan, 2000) and the instructor addresses the acting-out in a way that lowers self-esteem, he or she might intensify the behavior to the point of threatening the instructor.

Having described inattention, acting out, and threatening/harmful/violent behavior, the following are three specific strategies for preventing and managing these disruptive behaviors.

Inattention. Pike and Arch (1997) identify 127 practical strategies for improving attention and participation in human resource training situations. They recommend beginning sessions by setting out guidelines for behavior, proceeding in a crisp business-like manner, and using group activities. They also mention building motivational techniques into instruction. Their comments are a tacit recognition that learners may become inattentive because the instructor has not made reasonable attempts to explain the relevance of the material and to engage their intellectual curiosity.

Weiss and Murray (2003) recommend teaching organizational and time management skills to adults with ADHD and creating support groups for them through college academic skills centers, human resource departments, and/or employee assistance programs (EAPs). They encourage educators to refer learners with ADHD-like characteristics for psychoeducational and/or medical evaluations. Weiss and Murray also note that many adults with ADHD seem to be attracted to stimulating physical activity and recommend that adult educators working with easily distracted or unmotivated students should experiment with learning activities that stimulate tactile senses and allow the learners to move around and explore the learning environment.

Learners become increasingly inattentive and impulsive in environments inadequately organized for the task at hand, and the effect of the environment will be more pronounced for people who have tendencies toward ADHD. Therefore, instructors should consider implementing the recommendations made by Weiss and Murray (2003), in the preceding paragraph, in virtually all learning activities. In addition, instructors can break tasks into smaller and sequential steps, develop routines, minimize distractions, and offer the use of a day planner to improve attentiveness in all learners.

Mellard and Scanlon (2006) recommend direct and explicit instruction in ABD settings using the strategic instruction model, an eight-stage instructional process that guides a learner to master learning strategies. This requires individual learner attention with material broken into chunks that one can understand, practice, and rehearse.

Adult learners with a learning disability have the right to adult education under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and to reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Examples of instructional accommodations for adult learners under ADA are extra time to complete assignments, a quiet environment with no distractions, a written copy of oral presentations, and oral instructions for written assignments (Eastwick Covington, 2004).

Acting-out. Blaxter (1999) and Pike and Arch (1997) recommend that teachers minimize stress when they address acting-out behavior. They advocate engaging in private conferences rather than public conversations, showing empathy, and collaborating to find solutions to the problems that cause the learner stress. Pike and Arch also recommend varying the instructor's physical proximity to disruptive learners and varying seating arrangements as deterrents to disruptive behavior. Dinkmeyer and McKay (1983) recommend being firm and gentle simultaneously with learners prone to acting out. Braman (1998) recommends that adult educators assist students to develop critical thinking skills that allow them to understand their own feelings and how to manage them. In the event that a conflict develops in a learning setting, critical thinking skills can be used to accomplish conflict resolution by considering options and working toward consensus. Perlstein and Thrall (1996) also view conflict resolution strategies as a means to assist learners to manage feelings constructively through the use of collaborative problem solving, group discussion, and peer mediation. Jordan (2000) recommends that adult educators should look upon every disruptive behavior as an opportunity to teach appropriate social behaviors.

Threatening/harmful/violent behavior. Gomberg and Gray (2000) propose that the adult educator's interpersonal skills, classroom policies, and consistency of teaching style allow for successful management of potentially disruptive and violent situations. The Arizona State University Intergroup Relations Center recommends strategies for de-escalating conflict in the classroom including use of one's hands to signal a time out, asking students to maintain a journal as a way to vent strong emotions and give the instructor time to think of a plan, reminding students of ground rules to maintain safety, and contacting the campus police if a severe or large scale conflict emerges (Conflict de-escalation strategies, 2007). The University of Bath Student Support unit addresses serious disruptive behavior wherein a student places oneself or others at risk of harm. The Head of Student Services should be contacted. Consideration should be given

to contacting a campus or local mental health team to assess the disruptive student as well as to assess the needs of other students affected by the situation (Disruptive Behavior or Behavior Otherwise Giving Cause for Serious Concern, 2007). Wakeforest University's Environmental Health and Safety Office (2007) advises to

Avoid violent situations by planning a safe exit, standing behind a barrier, and using effective people skills. Once a violent situation is imminent insulate others from the potential violence, not placing oneself in harm's way if a weapon is involved, maintaining a positive posture and eye contact with the potential perpetrator, using verbal diffusing techniques, keeping the person talking, and showing concern while maintaining a distance. (para. 2-3)

Sometimes threatening, harmful, or violent behavior emerges from a psychiatric disorder. Braman (1998) and Perlstein and Thrall (1996) recommend the use of de-escalation techniques such as staying calm, assessing whether immediate support is needed to ensure everyone's safety, being clear and direct in a non-threatening way, achieving physical distance between adversaries, and notifying security if there is a risk of harm to someone.

Adult educators need the support and leadership of administrators in the field of adult education to successfully prevent threatening behavior. Systems level interventions that will serve to deter violence in school and agency settings include the development of policies on the consequences of threatening behavior, reporting, and responding to threatening behavior. Also, installing metal detectors and security cameras, adopting zero-tolerance weapons policies, strategic use of security officers, and use of mediation programs can serve to create a safe learning environment (Bender & McLaughlin, 1997; Katz, 1997).

Method

Given the emerging attention to disruptive behavior in the adult education literature and the growing concern with violent events such as the Virginia Tech shootings in adult education settings, the authors set out to sample the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of an initial cohort of adult educators about disruptive behavior. The research question was: What are the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of adult educators in terms of disruptive behavior of adult learners? The responses of the participants were evaluated using the conceptual framework of types and causes of disruptive behavior, its prevention and its management, crafted from the review of adult education and related literature. A purposive sample of adult education graduate students at a college in New York State, many of whom had already taught in adult education settings, was surveyed (see Appendix 1). Sowell (2001) refers to a purposive sample as one that provides evidence that data collected from selected participants are relevant to clarify the research question.

It was expected that the survey findings would provide a preliminary opportunity to hear the views of a convenience sample of preservice adult educators about the types of disruptive behavior and its causes, prevention, and management. Watson (1998) claims that survey research is the best method available for collecting original data for describing a population too large to

observe directly. She recommends that for adult educators survey research is an effective means to examine their practices systematically and to share their findings in the field.

Limitations of the Study

The authors make no claim that the sample or the survey data are representative of the experiences and beliefs of adult educators in general, of the adult educators in any specific area of adult education, or of preservice adult educators, in reference to disruptive behavior. The limitations of the methodology of the current study are that the sample includes adult education majors from only one college, does not include post-Master's adult educators, and that a single survey instrument was used.

Sample

The survey was conducted in two stages. In stage one all of the majors in the adult education Master's degree program at a college in New York State for whom a university email address was available were sent a cover letter requesting them to go to a website and complete a questionnaire about disruptive behavior of adult learners online and anonymously. The cover letter was emailed during the last week of classes in the spring semester of 2004. There was one follow-up email to request that the majors complete and return the questionnaire. Thirty-one questionnaires were returned from the 72 majors for a response rate of 43%.

In stage two, students in three sections of a required adult education methods course at the same college were invited to complete the questionnaire online. One online course was conducted in the fall of 2005 and one online section and one classroom section were conducted in the Spring of 2006. Students completed the questionnaire anonymously just as in stage one. Forty-four (86%) out of 51 students in these three sections completed the questionnaire. There were a total of 75 completed questionnaires from a total of 123 students invited to participate for a total of 61%. This rate exceeds the rate of 28% that is expected with institutional groups where there is anonymity but not an extrinsic incentive to complete a professional survey (Glass et al., 1993).

Data Collection

The questionnaire contained eight items about the background of the respondents and eight open-ended items that asked the respondents to describe their experiences with and views regarding disruptive behaviors of adult learners. The open-ended items sought to elicit views on the types, causes, prevention, and management of disruptive behavior.

Results

In this section, the findings of the survey administered to the purposive sample of adult education graduate students are presented.

Sample

Among the 75 survey respondents 38 (51%) were between the ages of 22 and 39, and 37 (49%) were 40 years or older. They had a substantial range and depth of experience with more than one-third having worked in adult education five or more years. They were a culturally diverse group of 15 (20%) African Americans, two (3%) Asian Americans, two (3%) Hispanics, and 56 (75%) Caucasians. There were 64 (85%) women and 11 (15%) men.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study and the limitations of the sample, calculations of the frequency or severity of disruptive behaviors in specific areas of adult education or for the field as a whole are not offered. Instead, qualitative summaries of the responses to the open-ended questions are presented with illustration by verbatim responses. The authors felt that reading the verbatim responses would help the reader to identify with the experiences of the respondents.

Content analysis techniques (Dooley, 2001) were applied to calculate the percent of agreement between the two authors classifying the responses to the two open-ended items on 'most common disruptive behavior' and 'most difficult disruptive behavior'. The responses were classified as Inattentive, Acting-Out, Threatening/Harmful/Violent, Other, or Not Applicable. The definitions of Inattentive, Acting-Out, and Threatening/Harmful/Violent are in the introduction. "Other" referred to descriptions of behavior that were disruptive but not belonging to one of the three categories. "Not Applicable" referred to responses that described something other than a clearly disruptive behavior, for example, "None" in response to 'most common' or 'most difficult' disruptive behavior. To avoid inflating the percent of agreement, responses that were classified "Not Applicable" by both authors were excluded from the calculations. If a respondent described more than one behavior, we used only the first one listed to calculate the percent of agreement.

The agreement between the two raters was 86% for most common problem and 87% for most difficult problem. Disagreements occurred typically when a response did not describe a behavior in sufficient detail such as "On a couple of occasions, we have had a learner that raised her voice significantly to the point of almost hollering at the trainer and 'blaming' the trainer for what the trainee couldn't do." Clearly, this behavior involves acting-out a negative emotion. One author thought the "almost hollering" and the "blaming" constituted a threat; the other did not. Five (8%) of 64 descriptions of the most common disruptive behaviors were classified as 'Other' by at least one rater. Similarly, five (8%) of 63 descriptions of the most difficult problem behaviors were classified as 'Other.' These results give clear albeit preliminary support to the reliability and usefulness of using inattentive, acting-out, and threatening/harmful/violent as the basis for classifying disruptive behavior of adult learners.

Most Common Problems with Disruptive Behavior

Most respondents gave descriptions of inattention ("During a computer lab a student may play on the computer or use the internet") and acting-out ("Constantly asking questions in search of recognition") in response to the question about the most common problems with disruptive behavior. No respondent gave an example of a threatening/harmful/violent behavior as a

common problem. However, there were indications that acting-out behaviors can be hurtful to teachers of adults. For example, one respondent expressed frustration with intentionally hurtful behaviors such as “Exaggerated yawns, sneezes, comments made while feigning a yawn, or pretending to sleep in the classroom.”

Most Difficult Problems with Disruptive Behavior

The responses to the item about the most difficult problems overlapped with the responses about the most common problems with disruptive behavior. Overall, the respondents stated that their most difficult problems are with learners who have unresolved personal issues that surface in the course of their learning activities, for example, “Students expressing anger or criticism in an unhelpful way.” One respondent reported, “Actual slander was written about me in a student newspaper.” Another wrote, “A male student had some alcohol and personal issues going on at home. One day he snapped and began yelling and threatening everyone whom he felt was judging him or who disagreed with him.”

Type of Problem You Most Want Help With

Less than a third of the responses to this item described a disruptive behavior. The majority of the responses described the training that respondents as teachers most desired - for example, “training to be able to tactfully and respectfully approach them and talk with them about their behavior without offending them.” The respondents wanted training to help with motivating learners who resist learning, communicating with learners who contribute to a hostile classroom atmosphere, and defusing situations where learners are at risk for becoming physically aggressive.

Perceived Causes of Disruptive Behavior

The responses to the questions about the causes of the most common problems and the most difficult problems were grouped together according to the three types of disruptive behavior.

Inattentiveness. The respondents attributed inattentiveness to simple misunderstanding of appropriate behavior such as not knowing that their whispering was audible, to the personal limitations of the learners such as being unable to attend for extended periods, and to flawed teaching such as lecturing for too long.

Acting-out. The respondents were inclined to view acting-out behavior as the result of being forced to attend learning activities by authorities, not seeing the value of the education offered them, mental health issues, and personal stressors. They mentioned emotional needs for recognition and power much as Hughes (2000) did. They indicated that with adult learners it is difficult to differentiate between missing lessons/sessions as a form of acting-out versus as an understandable consequence of having commitments to fulfill multiple roles.

Threatening/harmful/violent. The respondents thought that threatening, harmful, and violent behaviors emanated from personal stressors and/or mental health problems. Substance abuse was the only specific mental health disorder mentioned.

Effective Practices for Dealing with Disruptive Learners

The respondents commonly stated that teachers should communicate with disruptive learners in supportive, private conversation. Similarly, the respondents suggested that teachers should manage learning activities by being well organized and yet flexible enough to accommodate differing learning styles and interests. They recommended that there are times when a teacher has to display courage and skill in setting limits or confronting a learner, but did not offer how teachers should conduct themselves in those situations. One respondent suggested using a system of natural and logical consequences, similar to the model developed to deal with acting-out by Dinkmeyer and McKay (1983).

Agency Practices to Help in Dealing with Disruptive Learners

It was recommended that administrators should make, publicize, and follow through on policies for dealing with disruptive behavior. One respondent suggested that employers consolidate their training programs to eliminate redundant and/or excessive requirements for training so that trainees would become less frustrated and, therefore, less likely to act out their frustrations in training sessions.

It was requested that agencies train adult educators in conflict resolution and de-escalation strategies and that agencies provide individual consultation for teachers who face disruptive behaviors. Several respondents requested the time and support to develop and direct their own peer training programs on disruptive behavior.

Additional Comments

Two respondents made comments that all teachers need to be prepared to deal with disruptive behavior. One indicated that early in her career she had been caught off guard by a conflict between students. She said she was aware of not knowing what to do and aware that the learners could tell she did not know what to do. She felt that she lost credibility with the learners in the process. Another recounted being unsure of how to deal with learners who were talking so he ignored them, hoping they would stop. Unfortunately, the talking spread among other learners and persisted in subsequent activities.

Discussion

The survey results seem to corroborate the conceptual framework crafted from the review of the adult education and related literature, presented in this article, on the types and causes of disruptive behavior. This framework is used to develop guidelines for preventing and managing disruptive behavior and to recommend directions for future research.

The Types of Disruptive Behavior in Adult Education

Adult learners sometimes exhibit behaviors that are disruptive to the learning process and that span a continuum that includes inattention, acting-out, and threatening/harmful/violent behavior.

Disruptive behavior may escalate if educators allow it to go unchecked and/or if educators respond in ways that endanger the self-esteem of the learner. Disruptive behavior should be viewed in terms of a continuum of disruptive behaviors running from inattention, to acting-out, to threatening/ harmful/violent behavior. The crux of the matter is not simply that these three degrees of behavior represent different levels of severity, but that behavior that starts out as simple inattention, if not addressed effectively, has the potential to escalate into more serious disruption. It is important that adult educators respond to all disruptive behavior early on with sensitivity, respect, and firmness when indicated.

The Causes of Disruptive Behavior in Adult Education

The following factors may provoke or contribute to the onset of disruptive behavior:

1. Presence of a disability that may cloud judgment or increase the likelihood of impulsivity.
2. Limited development of social skills in the developmental period or history of being a victim of violence or abuse may result in underdeveloped ability to attend, to moderate negative emotions, and/or to sufficiently empathize and respect the rights of others.
3. Frustration, anxiety, and anger caused by stress related to the demands of performing the multiple roles of learner, worker, wage earner, parent, and spouse/partner may obstruct one's ability to attend to learning tasks.
4. Learning environment factors such as poorly run learning activities, perceived irrelevance of the learning objectives to one's career goals, the lack of an agency or school policy on disruptive behavior, and feeling disconnected and even rejected by the instructor and other learners may cause frustration, anger, and insecurity.
5. Responses that teachers make to disruptive behavior can exacerbate the behavior, particularly if the response threatens the learner's self-esteem.

These causal factors are likely to work in synergy with each other such that the more of them impinging on a learning activity, the greater the possibility for disruptive behavior. Any given disruption might have more than one cause. Therefore, teachers should check for multiple causes for a disruption and be prepared to intervene on multiple levels.

Guidelines for Adult Educators Dealing With Disruptive Behavior

The following guidelines for prevention and intervention flow from the conceptual framework of types and causes of disruptive behavior presented above. They reflect the recommendations offered by adult educators in the literature review and by the survey

respondents. These guidelines are general and require empirical validation. This will be addressed further under recommendations for future research.

Accommodate developmental and related disabilities of learners. Collaborate with learners to address problems. Teachers often can prevent disruptive behavior by offering appropriate support to learners whose abilities to attend and control negative feelings are underdeveloped. Consult with mental health and/or education specialists, especially for attention deficits, reading disabilities, substance abuse, and to make referrals for counseling (Weiss & Murray, 2003).

Educate learners victimized by poverty, violence, or abuse. Assist learners to recognize the impact of personal poverty or violence on their capacity to learn in the present (Kappel & Daley, 2004; Machura, 1997; Wright, 1991). Make a referral for counseling if the learner needs professional intervention.

Minimize stress. Create a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Minimize threats to self-esteem. Diffuse negative emotions through effective classroom teaching techniques and established communication techniques (Moran, 2001).

Conduct effective learning activities. Develop appropriate lesson plans and learning activities that engage learners and, thereby, prevent disruptive behavior. Use techniques such as arranging the physical environment to focus attention, organize learning activities, and vary teaching/learning methods and embed motivational tactics in instruction as mentioned by Weiss and Murray (2003) and Pike and Arch (1997).

Use personal communication interventions. Teachers can learn to respond to disruptive behavior in ways that help learners to minimize the severity of the behavior and to avoid escalation. Discuss problematic behavior with learners with discretion and in private, using established communication techniques, suggesting what learners could do differently, and asking the learner for suggestions how to replace disruptive behaviors with successful learning behaviors (Blaxter, 1999).

Set limits and use de-escalation techniques. Explain classroom rules at the outset of learning activities, emphasizing how they help everyone and facilitate learning. Respond at the onset of disruptive behavior. If possible, use non-confrontive techniques initially to avoid escalation. Avoid using penalties, but, if using penalties is unavoidable, describe them as the natural and logical consequences of the disruptive behavior, not as a way of punishing the learner. Deal with disruptions firmly and gently simultaneously. Support the self-esteem of all learners at all times.

When a crisis arises take action to prevent a learner who is behaving contentiously from gaining an audience, stay calm, be respectful, speak with the learner privately, project confidence that the learner will cooperate, avoid assigning blame, avoid threats, and adopt a problem-solving demeanor. Remove yourself and others from any potential for danger and call for security assistance early on if there is a risk of harm (Braman, 1998).

Analyzing disruptive behavior. Look for multiple causes to disruptive behavior and consider using these guidelines simultaneously or consecutively based on the situation. The adult educator needs to exercise judgment in discerning the nature of a particular disruptive behavior and in choosing the interventions that will be helpful to resolve the situation.

Training and preparation for teachers. Follow the policies of the employing school or agency on ethical and legal matters such as reporting threatening behavior to security personnel, learner safety, and learner confidentiality. Request support from school or agency administrators through review of policies and use of mentors and emergency response teams. Request agency training on prevention and management of disruptive behavior as well as support for conducting peer training.

Adult educators are encouraged to anticipate the kinds of disruptive behaviors that they might face and to prepare strategies for responding to them. One should be prepared to address different situations depending on the present need, for example, asking a learner to pay attention by having a private word or by speaking to a group of inattentive learners publicly. Consider the need to decide about asking the aggressor or the victim to leave the room in a case where two learners are in serious conflict.

Finally, it seems evident that adult educators have a responsibility to adult learners, to themselves, and to their field, to develop skills to deal with disruptive behavior. This will ensure a safe and stimulating learning environment for everyone and one that will provide disruptive learners the opportunity to become productive learners. The adult educator should look on instances of disruptive behavior as opportunities to teach and model behavior that is consistent with effective learning.

Disruptive behavior is often a continuation of lifelong patterns that do not change quickly. Expectations should be kept moderate to avoid discouragement, but consistent to ensure safety and effective learning conditions. A teacher support system of peers should be cultivated for one's emotional well-being and to increase expertise in handling disruptive behavior through professional dialogue.

Recommendations for Future Research

The above guidelines are more general than specific. For example, adult educators are advised to create a friendly and supportive atmosphere. However, detailed prevention and intervention strategies that implement the guidelines, such as arriving early and being the last to leave, calling each learner by name, and finding something positive in whatever learners say and do, need to be identified and evaluated. At this point there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of these guidelines and of prevention and intervention strategies that support them.

How will these guidelines and any resulting prevention and intervention strategies perform in different adult education settings? How effectively will teachers actually implement these guidelines, and after what kind of training? It is recommended that these guidelines be used for planning and evaluating training programs for adult educators (Weiss, 1998). The following

additional suggestions for conducting and evaluating training programs on disruptive behavior are offered:

1. Base training programs on the results of needs assessments of the participants and/or have teachers plan their own training. This gives the trainers a better chance to engage the teachers and will lead to a database on how disruptive behaviors vary across adult learning settings.
2. Provide didactic materials in text. This helps the trainees and enables researchers to replicate and build on each other's work regarding which intervention strategies are effective.
3. Emphasize application activities, such as role-playing, and make detailed descriptions of the activities available to other researchers to facilitate replication and information on effective professional development teaching methods.
4. Provide training in activities such as teaching circles, mentoring, and peer coaching to promote transfer of learning, emotional support, and continuing professional development (Moran, 2001).
5. Evaluate the impact of training programs in terms of changes in the behavior of teachers and of changes in the disruptive behavior of learners in order to provide information about what actually works in dealing with disruptive behavior.

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Appendix 1.

Survey on Disruptive Behavior of Adult Learners

Please complete this survey in a single session and please give careful thought to your responses. Avoid listing any information that could identify a learner, an agency, or yourself as you complete this form. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Age
 1. Under 25
 2. 25-29
 3. 30-34
 4. 35-39
 5. Over 39
2. Race
 1. African American
 2. Asian
 3. Caucasian
 4. Hispanic
 5. Native American
3. Gender
 1. Male
 2. Female
4. Number of years employed in adult education full time plus number of years employed part time
 1. None
 2. Less than one year
 3. 1-4
 4. 5-9
 5. 10-14
 6. More than 14
5. Number of years as a teacher of adults full time plus number of years as a teacher part time
 1. None
 2. Less than one year
 3. 1-4
 4. 5-9
 5. 10-14
 6. More than 14
6. Current role in adult education:
 1. None
 2. Teacher
 3. Administrator

7. Location:

1. Within community distance of the college
2. Within New York State but outside the local area
3. Outside New York State

8. Primary adult education venue:

1. Literacy/GED
2. College/community college/proprietary school
3. For profit organization
4. Not for profit organization
5. Government agency
6. Community education
7. Continuing professional education

In this study a disruptive learner is anyone whose behavior has a negative effect on the teaching learning process. A sigh of boredom, a late and noisy arrival to a training session, an argument with a classmate, and a threat of physical violence to you the teacher are all examples of disruptive behavior. Given this broad definition of disruptive learners, please respond to the following with sufficient detail to give a clear idea about your experiences with disruptive learners.

9. Provide an example of the most common problems you have with disruptive learners.

10. Explain what you think are the most likely causes of that type of common problem with disruptive learners.

11. Provide an example of the most difficult problems you have had with disruptive learners.

12. Explain what you think are the most likely causes of that type of difficult problem with disruptive learners.

13. Provide an example of the type of problem with disruptive learners that you most want help with.

14. Give an example of the most effective practices for dealing with disruptive learners.

15. Give an example of what agencies can do to help teachers deal with disruptive learners.

16. Please enter any additional comments that you think are relevant to helping adult educators deal with disruptive learners.