HANDBOOK OF SUPPORT

For Instructors and Administrators of Online GED Programs
For Supporting Students for Persistence and Success

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook contains information on different types of supports and interventions which can be provided to students of online Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in order to help them persist and succeed in their programs. Section I of the handbook presents a table which lists different types of supports/interventions which can be provided by administrators and/or instructors of online ABE to students. The table also includes information on why, how and when to provide these supports and interventions. Section I discusses first the process which led to the development of this table, presents background information for supports/interventions listed in this table and lastly discusses the ways in which this table can be used by administrators and instructors of online ABE programs.

Section II in the handbook presents the revised meta-cognitive awareness inventory (MAI) which was originally developed by Gregory Schraw and Rayne Sperling Dennison in 1994 and which was piloted with students of online ABE programs in Massachusetts during the period of December-March 2009. This section discusses first the purpose of the MAI, includes some background information on MAI and different types of meta-cognitive skills that MAI seeks to assess, describes the process by which MAI was revised and condensed in order to adapt it for ABE students and discusses lastly how MAI can be utilized by instructors.

Section III presents weekly questions which can be used for online-journaling. Online journaling is an established and commonly used tool in adult basic education for helping students reflect on their learning process and enhance their learning strategies. Section III begins by presenting the background for online journaling and includes information on different roles of response and principles to govern the use of online journaling. Section III presents also some suggestions on how online journaling can be used in online ABE programs.
1.1 What is the Table of Supports/Interventions?

The table of support/interventions which is presented in the end of this section on page 11 includes information on:

- **What** supports can be provided to students of online-ABE education by administrators and instructors of the programs;
- **Why** these supports/interventions are important;
- **How** to provide these supports/interventions; who does what and which resources should be in place for providing these supports/interventions to students;
- **When** these supports/interventions should be provided.

This table was developed by the Center for Social Policy (CSP) research team and supports/interventions in the table were chosen in a manner which heeded the individual characteristics and needs of online ABE students, the characteristics of the specific context of learning and the specific needs of the ESE funded online ABE education programs. Although little to no rigorous evaluation\(^1\) has been done on the effectiveness of student support on learner persistence, particularly in the context of adult education and distance learning, the supports/interventions included in the table are based on the many years of rich experiences of educators in this field, research on learning models in general, and student surveys of expectations and needs for support services. Furthermore multiple streams of information collected during the ESE funded pilot research project conducted by the Center for Social Policy during 2008 and 2009 fed into the information presented in the table. These sources of information include:

- Analyses of the information gathered from 73 interviews conducted with applicants of online learning through the pilot screening process during December-March 2009. This

\(^1\) Rigorous evaluations of such interventions can be very costly; require time and careful experimental design with the availability of clear outcomes for students who do and do not participate in these evaluations.
information helped to deepen the knowledge about candidates and students of online ABE programs.

- Analyses of the responses by 99 online ABE students to the revised MAI. This helped to deepen the knowledge about students’ self assessment of their meta-cognitive skills.
- Analyses of the information gathered from two focus groups with students of online ABE programs conducted during April 2009. The focus groups focused on gaining the student perspective on support.
- Analyses of the students’ responses to online journaling questions. Eleven students in online ABE programs participated in online journaling answering a set of questions weekly over a period of 16 weeks. Some set of questions focused mainly on challenges students face in studying online, the types of supports they utilize and seek when they come across challenges.
- Extensive reviews of the literature on support and interventions in the context of online ABE programs.

1.2 Definition of Success

Success and persistence in this mode of learning can be defined in many different ways. One of the most useful definitions of success is one that takes into regard the context of learning and the life circumstances of an adult learner. Success, in this context, is defined as persistence in the GED program, which leads to getting the GED. Persistence is defined, along the lines of the other studies in this area, as continued attendance in programs and, when a need to stop out of the program arises, having a plan to return as soon as the reason to stop out has been eliminated. (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999).

1.3 Background Information for the Table

Learner persistence is a key factor in the success of distance learning in any field of study; persistence is crucial for adult learners in general (Hensley & Kinser, 2001; Kerka, 1998) and particularly in basic education and English as a second language programs (Quigley, 1998; Comings et al., 1999; CALPRO, 2007; Nash & Kallenbach, 2009). Supports for learners can be
difficult to implement without regular face-to-face contact; even identifying challenges to persistence can present problems for programs and instructors. A review of the available literature, combined with the analyses of the information listed in the previous section led to identification of some strategies and examples of learner supports and interventions that programs and instructors can use to help identify challenges and barriers to learning, promote learner persistence, and encourage meta-cognitive development.

Delivering support services to students requires participation and coordination from all program stakeholders, but also requires the integration of student and instructor voices in all aspects of course design and delivery. Communication and information sharing are critical between different actors for effective delivery of certain supports especially in the beginning during screening and orientation of students for online learning. Information from the literature on supports and interventions listed in the table is presented below.

1.2.1 Screening and Orientation

Addressing the potential challenges to learner persistence requires providing proper tools for instructors. Although ideal resources are not always available to all programs, orientation, clear and concise content delivery, and adequate training can prepare learners for success. One of the few surveys of students on support expectations indicates that students value clear and detailed information about program requirements, courses, and expectations; further, communication using multiple modes and media is of great importance (Choy, McNickle, & Clayton, 2002).

The screening process is the first substantive contact programs have with potential students or learners, and can be an opportunity for the programs to identify risk factors and potential barriers to learning early in the program, when intervention is critical (Quigley, 1998; Kerka, 2005; Artino, 2008). At the program level, learners should be screened for the ability and commitment to complete the program (Bartlett et al., 2006) as well as cues (defined by Quigley to include “skepticism, hostility, hesitancy, and uncertainty) that learners may be at especially high risk for
attrition (Quigley, 1998). The requirements for participating in distance learning should be made clear—both technological (e.g. a computer with a modem, the ability to view documents or multi-media presentations, any software requirements) and in terms of program rules (e.g., rules on grading, completion of coursework, if applicable). An example of these efforts is Cercone’s (2008) work on identifying adult learner characteristics with instructional intervention and technological resources. She points out that online learning is a growing field and as such, faces the challenge of designing instruction to address the adult learning needs through technology, including a comfortable social environment. This implies the importance of the instructors’ role as a social agent of change in promoting care and respect in the virtual community of learners. Similarly, CALPRO (2007) and Bartlett, Norton, Porter, Powers, Rogers, Stiles & Woolley’s (2005) work addresses intervention strategies that could help to foster the effectiveness of online programs and increase adult learner persistence.

The program can also provide basic computer training on the on-line course management system (CMS), if any, and any other software (e.g. web-based pedagogical tools) that is used in the coursework.

Program administrators should also consider other tools that are available to instructors. For example, research shows that flexible web-based pedagogical tools (WBPTs) embedded in course management systems (CMS) are useful in helping teachers to present a clear course curriculum, map out expectations for students, and link to illustrative examples of course content (Dabagh, 2006; Kim & Baylor, 2006). Course Management Systems with flexible content can also help students direct their own learning using a variety of enhancements to the curriculum—for example, hyperlinks, special topics, or special multi-media presentations selected by the instructor. These tools can help students to manage their own autonomous learning.

However, WBPTs and CMS are expensive and may not be an option for many programs to implement. Instead some of their content may be mimicked by identifying the most useful constructs embedded in these tools. For example, an article in Online Classroom suggests using a CMS to perform test runs of teaching tools with students to ensure they are able to connect to
content when they need to (2005). Instructors and program staff can easily plan test runs with students as they enroll in courses without the aid of additional software. Other suggestions include:

- Simplifying the layout of the course material architecture, and putting them in one central online place.
- Removing any content or tools that will not be used for the course, so there is no potential for confusion.
- Make sure all links are working and that chat rooms are functional prior to the start of the course.

1.2.2 Fostering Communication and Group Formation

A cornerstone in the interactivist-constructivist framework (discussed in Kahraman, Mallonna, Friedman, Kahan, Platt, 2008) and in persistence literature in general is developing a community of learners in the context of meta-cognitive skill building and support (Quigley and Uhland, 2000). Instructors and learners are the primary actors in building community, but the program must provide an opportunity for that community to develop. That is, the software and support for online peer interaction and networking in the form of chat rooms, both monitored and unmonitored, reflective writing or online journaling, and two way learner-instructor communication (e.g. e-mail, web and telephone conferencing tools) should be provided by the program and their use encouraged.

Encouraging peer discussion in chat rooms can have academic and social benefits for learners and instructors. Instructors can encourage the use of supervised chat rooms to discuss course content, ask questions about specific assignments and seek support from instructors and peers. The use of instructor-monitored chat rooms, however, is not likely to lead to the formation of social networks. We recommend the additional use of unsupervised chat rooms to allow learners to develop independent social networks without scrutiny from the teacher. Instructors may even choose to form small groups among learners to foster peer support.
1.2.3 Progress Monitoring, Self Directed Learning and Using Innovative Instructional Materials

Alongside communication tools and ways to encourage dialog between instructors and students, instructors must also ensure that students are building skills, problem-solving, and learning to manage their own progress toward their learning goals (Kramarski & Gutman, 2006; Artino, 2007; Azevedo, Cromley, & Seibert 2004; Hurd et al., 2001). The literature suggests using adaptive scaffolding (the instructor “continuously diagnoses students’ understanding” (Artino, 2007), to adjust course content and assignments. Without a flexible curriculum, however, instructors must be creative in seeking feedback from learners on their individual progress in acquiring knowledge and provide enrichment activities and opportunities to transfer and apply knowledge to different situations, although the core assignments may not be adaptable (Hurd et al, 2001). Integrating presentations in other media like video or audio, providing links to other learning materials online, or developing individual enhancement activities can be ways to provide adaptive learning in a fixed curriculum environment.

Online journaling is helpful in encouraging goal-setting and reassessment, getting input on the cultural inclusivity of the curriculum (McLoughlin, 2001b; Lin, 2001) engaging students in their own learning process (learner autonomy) (Kramarski & Gutman, 2006; Artino, 2007; Azevedo et al., 2004; Hurd et al., 2001), and connecting coursework to learners’ every day life.

1.2.4 Intervening with At Risk Students, Linking Students with other Resources in the Community

Programs can encourage linkages with outside resources, including local libraries, community colleges or community centers (Bartlett et al, 2006). These can be library resources, but they can also be pathways to outside tutoring, mentoring, job placement, or counseling to help address some of the barriers learners encounter while in the program (NACADA, 1999; Floyd & Powell, 2004; Quigley, 1997). Setting up agreements with local resources ahead of time can allow students to take advantage of them easily when the need arises.
Finally, a survey of students enrolled in an online technical program at the college level determined that students valued other features of a traditional learning environment and would like to see them online (LaPadula, 2003). For example, students surveyed were interested in extra-curricular activities, such as a student newspaper or guest "speakers" (or bloggers?) from outside the course community.

Instructors are, of course, the “on-the-ground” implementers of any learner support. A number of the tools discussed above should be encouraged and used by instructors as pathways for two-way dialogue for a variety of instruction purposes. E-mail, web and telephone conferencing, and chat rooms are easy to use and effective supports when used to intervene with at-risk students who may be encountering barriers to learning—for example, discouraged by a difficult assignment or distracted by a family problem.

1.2.5 Creating Culturally Inclusive Course Materials and Environment, Measuring Student Satisfaction Mid-Course and at the End of the Course

Adult learners are diverse and bring a wealth of experiences and perspectives to their learning. Their diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as well as their experiences grounded in particular historic times shape the way they perceive and situate themselves in the world. Consequently, they bring these unique and diverse meanings to the learning process and to their interaction with instructors and peers. In the past, cultural values of adult learners have been analyzed applying a deficit perspective, concentrating on “what is missing” or “what is wrong” with them. Currently, adult learner scholars point out the importance of designing culturally relevant instructional practices (Cercone, 2008; Park, 2008; Sparks, 2002, Guy 1999; Imel, 1995).

Park (2008) points out that instruction based on acknowledging and valuing diversity helps to build assets. Her research findings suggest that feeling valued increases the likelihood that adult learners will persist in accomplishing their learning goal. Corley (2003) also explains that supportive learning environments facilitate and promote diverse perspectives and multiple
interpretations. Course assessments can be used creatively to obtain feedback from adults about their perceptions on culturally based instruction and other different aspects of the program at different points in time (LaPadula, 2003)

### 1.3 Suggestions on Using the Table of Supports/Interventions

Most of the supports listed in the table are basic components of a successful online learning program and instruction. The table can be used by program administrators and instructors for:

- **Evaluation**: As a guideline to identify missing links and resources in the current provision of these supports and interventions to students. Administrators and instructors can then start building the infrastructure capacity for providing some of these resources.

- **Professional Development**: As a baseline tool to foster sharing best support practices among administrators and instructors in the context of professional development. The guideline could be complemented with additional practices and resources.

- **Instruction**: As topics for promoting students reflection about the contextual factors of their learning process. It could also serve for obtaining feedback from students about particular support practices.

- **Applied Research**: As a base tool for articulating a research design of support practices. The objective could be to follow up the effectiveness of particular support practices in the learning context in which they are applied.

The systematic recording in how these and additional practices are used in specific learning context could be a great contribution in advancing the understanding of adult learners use of support. It could also help in enhancing the knowledge about the effectiveness of some practices in facilitating persistence.
### 1.4 Table of Supports/Interventions for Students of Online ABE Programs

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<th>WHAT</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUPPORTS/INTERVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td><strong>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE CAN:</strong></td>
<td><strong>AGENCIES CAN:</strong> (Hubs and/or partners)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Screening</strong></td>
<td>First substantive contact programs have with potential students or learners</td>
<td>Make sure that the time required for screening is allotted and resources are there for those who will be conducting the screening</td>
<td>Use assessment time and screening to identify potential barriers to learning, e.g. motivational barriers, learning barriers, and to clarify expectations</td>
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<td>- The computer skills and literacy level requirements;</td>
<td>Make sure that the material resources are there for the tools which will be used during the screening</td>
<td>- To work with the students to come up with a plan for support using the information from the interview guide</td>
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<td>- The interview guide provided by the Department (Available in a separate handbook)</td>
<td>In the program, when intervention is critical</td>
<td>- Time for identifying supports that are needed using the interview guide</td>
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<td>- Screening tools</td>
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## Supports for learner persistence and success in ABE online-learning*

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<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>RESOURCES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION</th>
<th>WHEN TO DO IT</th>
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<td><strong>SUPPORTS/INTERVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td><strong>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE CAN:</strong></td>
<td><strong>AGENCIES CAN:</strong> (Hubs and/or partners)</td>
<td><strong>INSTRUCTOR CAN:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Orient students to distance learning</td>
<td>- Will set the foundation for students' persistence in the long term along with the screening</td>
<td>- Present clear information on program expectations, and technological and multi-media requirements</td>
<td>- Provide support to students in getting started with the technology</td>
<td>- Make GED program expectations clear (e.g. pre-test, post-test, grading)</td>
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<td>- Good opportunity to deepen the trust relationship being built with the student.</td>
<td>- Do test runs of all technological tools</td>
<td>- Have students perform test runs of the software, links and other technology requirements</td>
<td>- Present due dates and required milestones clearly</td>
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<td>- Test links, downloads, and other embedded software (e.g. PowerPoint, audio or video)</td>
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<td>- Provide information on whom to approach for help</td>
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<td>- Make sure chat rooms, interactive tools (e.g. online journals), and other communication tools are enabled and accessible</td>
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<td>- Discuss the program code of conduct</td>
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<td>- Discuss co-responsibilities</td>
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<td>- Further discuss issues about time management</td>
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<td>- Help students set clear academic goals</td>
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<td>AGENCIES CAN: (Hubs and/or partners)</td>
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<td><strong>Building a Community of Learners</strong></td>
<td>-Facilitate group formation through use of --un-moderated and moderated chat rooms --e-mails --phone trees --blogs --online forums/threaded discussions</td>
<td>-Helps to create a social and academic learner to learner support system</td>
<td>-Ensure the availability of software and technology -Assist the teacher in using the technology</td>
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<td>-Helps to mitigate the sense of isolation that can be experienced in online learning</td>
<td>-Establish a net etiquette and code of conduct -Initiate reflective social dialogue -Provide opportunities for open-ended discussion</td>
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<td>-Helps to maintain student interest and motivation</td>
<td>-Introduce optional enrichment content, for example, a guest blogger</td>
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<td>-Create opportunities for problem solving in groups</td>
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<td>-Encourage shared leadership</td>
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<td>-Provide timely and regular feedback on discussion boards</td>
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<td>IT capability for facilitating group formation online</td>
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## Supports for learner persistence and success in ABE online-learning*

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<td>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE CAN: (Hubs and/or partners)</td>
<td>SUPPORTS/ INTERVENTIONS</td>
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### Helping Learners Connect With Local Learning and Other Institutions

- Guide towards alternative venues for learning
- Address diverse needs of adults through connecting them with alternative services

- Supplementary resources other than the basic curriculum are required
- Adults' needs are diverse and most often go beyond getting a GED
- If not addressed these needs get in the way of getting a GED

- Initiate relationships with local public or community college libraries and non-profits which provide services for adults
- Provide links to local libraries, community college libraries
- Identify places students can go for extra help, for example, community centers that may provide tutoring

- Encourage use of materials outside the curriculum
- Train and orient students to library skills
- Direct students to outside resources and services as necessary

- Community linkages
- Human and other resources needed to create linkages

Phase I/II
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<td>SUPPORTS/ INTERVENTIONS</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE</td>
<td>INSTRUCTOR CAN:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor Strategies/ Monitoring Learner Progress</td>
<td>-Monitoring progress more of a challenge in an online context thus needs special attention</td>
<td>-Ensure technological tools are usable and available</td>
<td>-Emphasize availability of help and importance of seeking help</td>
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<td>-Helps students acquire metacognitive skills</td>
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<td>-Provide timely and helpful feedback</td>
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<td>-Prevents student drop out by identifying conflicts and intervening in a timely manner</td>
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<td>-Provide information on net etiquette and code of conduct for communicating with the instructor</td>
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<td>-Encourage learner feedback and dialogue</td>
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<td>-Emphasize value of learner voices and input</td>
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<td>-Encourage post-testing when appropriate</td>
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<td>-Acknowledge little success milestones</td>
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<td>-Establish certain regular hours when some form of help is available</td>
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- Time for monitoring student progress
- Access to communication tools

Phase I/II
Supports for learner persistence and success in ABE online-learning*/Instructor Strategies

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<td><strong>Instructor Strategies/ Teaching Learners to Direct Own Education</strong></td>
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<td>-Encourage students to take control of their learning process; to take initiative to learn</td>
<td>-Self-direction involves use of meta-cognitive strategies for learning</td>
<td>-Integrate online journaling into course requirements to help students strategize and self-assess</td>
<td>-IT and technical assistance</td>
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<td>-Build students confidence in ability to acquire new knowledge, and to use their background and experiences as resources</td>
<td>-Students differ in their skills and knowledge of strategies for &quot;learning how to learn&quot;, i.e., meta-cognitive strategies</td>
<td>-Use MAI to encourage learners to think about meta-cognitive skills</td>
<td>-Tools for online journaling enabled</td>
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<td>-Teach learners to build on their existing learning strategies and to acquire new ones for planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning</td>
<td>-Students can be taught to develop meta-cognitive learning strategies</td>
<td>-Collaboratively develop realistic overall learning goals for each student</td>
<td>-Curriculum development assistance and flexibility</td>
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<td>-Ensure delivery of adequate IT and technical assistance resources</td>
<td>-Create opportunities for self-evaluation through course assignments and formal assessments</td>
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<td>-Enable tools within course management system which allow students to manage program level information</td>
<td>-Provide learners with clear expectations and guidelines for assessment</td>
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<td>-Use self-assessment results and formal assessments to monitor students' progress and modify goals</td>
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<td>-Assign tasks which allow students to apply new knowledge to different situations</td>
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<td>-Teach learners to identify resources for learning</td>
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<td>-Design enrichment activities to focus on problem-solving</td>
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<td>HOW</td>
<td>WHEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supports/Interventions</strong></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>ESE and TEAM for Technological Assistance</td>
<td>Instructor Can:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructor Strategies/Engaging Learners Using Innovative and Appropriate Instructional Materials**

- Identify enrichment and enhancement to core curriculum
- Using innovative media and creative instructional strategies help instructors provide adaptive learning in a fixed curriculum environment
- Helps accommodate multiple learning styles and needs

- Assist instructors in seeking out innovative enrichments and enhancements to core curriculum
- Ensure learners have access to equipment and software needed to participate in multimedia learning

- Identify online resources for multiple media delivery modes
- Connect materials with Learner interests and experiences
- Use accessible online resources in individual and group assignments
- Allow learners opportunities to choose preferred learning modalities—video, audio, etc.
- Seek learner feedback on assignments and materials through online journaling and chat room discussions

Resources Needed for Implementation

- Access to multimedia materials and equipment
- Supplementary Curriculum development assistance
- Professional training in using new instructional materials and technology

When to Do It

Phase I/II
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORTS/INTERVENTIONS</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE</td>
<td>INSTRUCTOR CAN:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Strategies/Creating Culturally Inclusive Course Materials and Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Culturally inclusive means respecting the diversity of learners, including characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, gender as well as the wealth of experiences adults bring to their learning</td>
<td>- Adult learners are diverse and bring a wealth of experiences to their learning</td>
<td>- Actively seek knowledge about backgrounds and experience of incoming groups of learners</td>
<td>- Connect coursework and assignments to learner experiences and prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Create a database of shared information and knowledge, for example, past student reflection, helpful learning tools</td>
<td>- Encourage adults to apply knowledge from their life and work experiences to assignments and other coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Acknowledge adults own backgrounds and experiences as valuable resources for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Acknowledge and support cross-cultural interaction among learner peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Adapt traditional classroom student activities to online learning environment, e.g. student newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Human and other resources required to accumulate knowledge about adult learners' backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase I/II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Supports for learner persistence and success in ABE online-learning*/Instructor Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUPPORTS/INTERVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE</td>
<td>INSTRUCTOR CAN:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Instructor Strategies/Providing Interventions for At-Risk Students | -Adults have complex lives and circumstances may arise where they need to stop out or drop out of programs  
-Timely interventions will help with persistence | -Provide tutoring services  
-Link learners with counseling services  
-Encourage mentoring relationships | -Intervene quickly when barriers become apparent by using multiple communication modes  
-Encourage peer support  
-Form small learner groups  
-Foster peer networking in unsupervised learner chat rooms | -Linkages with outside resources, community centers, outside tutoring programs, libraries  
-IT capability for monitored and unmonitored chat rooms | Phase II |
### Supports for learner persistence and success in ABE online-learning*/Instructor Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
<th>WHEN TO DO IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUPPORTS/INTERVENTIONS</strong></td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>ESE and TEAM FOR TECHNOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE</td>
<td><strong>INSTRUCTOR CAN:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructor Strategies/Measuring Student Satisfaction Mid-Course and at the End of the Course</strong></td>
<td>- Student feedback helps identify instruction strategies and program characteristics which work and which don’t work</td>
<td>- Conduct brief online surveys</td>
<td>- Use student evaluations to fine-tune teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Implement an anonymous online “suggestion box”</td>
<td>- Technology for measuring student satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase Definitions**
- Phase I: Pre-Instruction, Course Planning Phase
- Phase II: Continuous throughout course instruction period

*Many different information sources and research methods have been used to develop the table of support. An examination of other studies and literature were part of the development process. These other studies and resources have been listed in the references section. Specific references to resources which discuss certain supports/interventions have been made in the discussion section on page 44.
II. META-COGNITIVE AWARENESS INVENTORY (MAI)

2.1 Background for Meta-Cognition and MAI

The ability to be a self-directed learner has been identified by scholars as necessary for succeeding in online learning. This ability involves the acquisition and practice of meta-cognitive skills. Meta-cognition has been defined as “the ability to reflect upon, understand and control one’s own learning.” (Schraw and Dennison 1994) Meta-cognitively aware learners have knowledge about what strategies they use when performing a task, which strategies are appropriate for which tasks and they are better able to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. (Schraw and Dennison 1994) There is some research which shows that meta-cognitively aware learners perform better in solving problems than learners who are unaware. (Schraw and Dennison 1994)

MAI is a 52 item inventory which aims to measure adults’ meta-cognitive awareness and was developed in 1994 by Gregory Schraw and Rayne Sperling Dennison. Previous research supports a two component model of meta-cognition (Schraw and Dennison 1994):

1) Knowledge about cognition encapsulates students’ knowledge about themselves, strategies, and conditions under which strategies are most useful (Schraw and Dennison 1994)

2) Regulation of cognition refers to knowledge about the way students plan for their learning, the way they manage the information they gather and monitor and correct comprehension errors, and evaluate their learning (Schraw and Dennison 1994)

MAI is presented in section 2.5 and the following section explains the revisions made to the MAI by the Center for Social Policy.
2.2 Revisions to the MAI

The Center for Social Policy selected statements from the MAI and revised them with the permission of original authors of the instrument with the purpose of making the instrument more accessible to students of ESOL online learning programs who have limited English skills.

The revised instrument included some non-MAI statements as well. These non-MAI items have been presented in Section 2.3 below. These items are included in Part I of the instrument.

The MAI items included in Part I of the instrument correspond predominantly to items which are related to the “knowledge of cognition” and the part II items correspond to regulation of cognition.

2.3 Non-MAI items

Non MAI items can be grouped in three categories as statements that assess:

- Dependence-independence; these items assess students’ ability to work on their own (Adapted from Grasha-Reichmann Student Learning Style Inventory, Grasha & Riechmann-Hruska, 1994).

- Preferred conditions for learning; these items assess students’ preferences for the presence of others and communications with others when they are learning (Adapted from Bernard, Brauer, Abrami & Surkes, 2004).

- Preferred mode of learning; these items assess students’ preference to study in traditional learning environment with face to face interaction.
Non-MAI Items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I-Question 7: Trying to decide what to study makes me uncomfortable.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 8: I frequently need information from teachers on how I am learning.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 9: I feel confident about my ability to learn on my own.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 10: I prefer to study alone.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 11: I prefer learning face to face in a classroom.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 12: Discussions with other students are a necessary part of my learning.</th>
<th>Part I-Question 13: I need to see the teacher to get feedback for my assignments.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


2.4 How to Use MAI

The revised MAI is available online and the link to the online version can be obtained from the ESE-ACLS Department. Teachers can use MAI as a support tool for fostering students’ meta-cognitive awareness. Administering MAI can help students to pay more attention to their qualities as learners and the different ways in which they learn. Ultimately, this can help students to reflect upon ways in which they develop further strategies.

The instructors can ask students to complete MAI online and discuss students’ responses individually through e-mail or other forms of online communication. Instructors can also ask students to complete MAI online and then create a collective online discussion of MAI items where students can contribute to and follow and see each others’ discussion of MAI.

The MAI statements could also be used as an online journaling assignment where students reflect on different strategies they use and those that they use less often. The instructor then can give feedback on how to develop new strategies or build on existing ones.
The table below presents the ways in which MAI items can be classified. The instructors can use these categories as a basis in their discussions with students.

**Classification of MAI Items:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Of Cognition</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The revised MAI has items which assess students’ knowledge about:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• themselves</td>
<td>Part I-1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conditions under which these strategies are useful</td>
<td>Part I-5, 6,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation of Cognition</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The revised MAI has also items which assess students’ knowledge about the ways they:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• plan for their learning</td>
<td>Part I-19; Part II-1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they manage the information</td>
<td>Part II-5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• monitor comprehension</td>
<td>Part II-11, 12, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• gather and correct comprehension errors</td>
<td>Part II-14, 15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• evaluate their learning</td>
<td>Part II-17, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) It is important to note that authors of MAI have not found evidence for a multi-sub-component of MAI; the evidence suggests a two component model of MAI. Still, these categories are useful for using MAI as a support tool and when discussing strategies with students.
### 2.5 The Revised MAI Instrument

**“THINGS I DO WHILE I AM LEARNING”** Part 1

The Center for Social Policy and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education are working together on a research about adult learners and distance learning. Below is the survey "Things I do while I am learning." We would like you to participate in filling out the survey. The statements in the survey are about how you learn. In the survey, 1 means "never true" and 10 means "always true". Please click on the number which best represents your opinion. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

By submitting the survey, you agree that your responses can be included in the research project. We thank you in advance for your participation.

**PART 1 OF 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Circle/Fill In Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I know my strengths and weaknesses.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I am able to separate more important from less important information.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I am a good judge of how well I understand something.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I learn best when I am interested in the topic.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I learn best when the topic is related to my experiences as a learner.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I change the way I study depending on the assignment.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Trying to decide what to study makes me uncomfortable.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I frequently need information from teachers on how I am learning.</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Never True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I feel confident about my ability to learn on my own.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I prefer to study alone.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I prefer learning face to face in a classroom.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Discussions with other students are a necessary part of my learning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I need to see the teacher to get feedback for my assignments.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I try to learn in the same ways that have worked well in the past.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I am good at remembering information.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I am good at organizing information.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I am good at organizing my time.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I can tell how much time an assignment will take for me to complete.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I organize my time to best accomplish my learning goals.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quinsigamond Community College, QCC-HUB The Literacy Project Inc. Webster Adult Learning Center Worcester Adult Learning Center Notre Dame Education Center, Boston-HUB Cambridge Community Learning Center Jamaica Plain Community Centers Inc. Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence Somerville Public Schools (SCALE)
“THINGS I DO WHILE I AM LEARNING” Part 2

Below are a few more statements. Again, when you read each statement imagine yourself doing a task at school, but this time please think about how often the statement is true. Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means none of the time and 10 means all of the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Circle/Fill in Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I read instructions very carefully.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I think about things I need to do to get the task done.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I ask myself: what do I need to learn?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I think of different ways of doing it and choose the best one.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While I am learning…(questions 5-13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Circle/Fill in Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I ask myself if what I’m reading is related to what I already know.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I try to break studying down into smaller steps.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I find the overall meaning rather than specific information.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I think of examples when I try to learn.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I try to translate new information into my own words.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I draw pictures or diagrams to help me remember.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>None of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I stop and ask myself if I am meeting my learning goals.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I look for many possible answers when solving a problem.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I go back and review the material to check how well am I doing.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I don’t understand something…(questions 14-16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I stop and go back over information that is not clear.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I change the way I study when I have a problem.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I ask others for help.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once I finish a task…(questions 17-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
<th>All of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I ask myself if there was an easier way to do things.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I ask myself how well I accomplished my goals.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I go back and check how much I have learned.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. If you have an ID number, please enter your ID number in the space provided below.

21. Please enter your first name and last name in the space provided below. 
    First Name
    Last Name

22. Program
Quinsigamond Community College (QCC)-HUB The Literacy Project Inc. Webster Adult Learning Center Worcester Adult Learning Center Notre Dame Education Center, Boston Cambridge Community Learning Center Jamaica Plain Community Centers Inc. Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence Somerville Public Schools (SCALE)

*The survey has been condensed and adapted from the Meta-Cognitive Assessment Inventory developed by Gregory Schraw and R.S. Dennison. (Schraw, G., and Dennison, R.S. (1994). Assessing metacognitive awareness. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 19, 460-475.) Thank you for your feedback.

Your responses are important to us!
III. ONLINE JOURNALING

3.1 Background: Reflective Online Journaling in Distance Education

Reflection and reflective work has been used for many years as a learning tool for adults across the educational spectrum; from teacher and practitioner training to adult education (Schon, 1983; Jarvis, 2001; Hiemstra, 2001). Journal writing has been a tool used particularly by educators of adults to encourage learners to reflect on their process, modify ways of thinking, problem solve, and make connections using self-examination mechanisms (Jarvis, 2001; Kerka, 2002). There is a wide breadth of literature in a variety of fields on how journals may be used to enhance teaching methods and learner self-discovery, but there has been little evaluation of the effects of journal writing on learning outcomes (Kerka, 2002) except in specialized fields of higher education like healthcare training (Kerka, 2002; Jasper, 1999). The common thread across the literature on reflective journaling, regardless of complexity of the field or use of the writing, is that the introspective nature of journaling can help broaden and deepen the knowledge acquired in a traditional or non-traditional setting (Kerka, 2002; Andrusyszyn and Davie, 1997; Hiemstra, 2001).

3.2 Reflective Journals and Student/Teacher Relationships

Some instructors have found that reflective journals can help to build student/teacher relationships (Andrusyszyn, 1997; Fenwick, 2001), but differ in their preferred way of responding to journals. Boud (2001) recommends allowing students to keep journal entries private or not, depending on their own preferences. Fenwick (2001) details different modes of responses- peer response, instructor response, or self response. She details more complex respondent roles, included in section 3.4. In responding to journals for writers who have not mastered written English, instructors can use the journal as a way to encourage appropriate usage and grammar for ESL students or others (Orem, 2001). Further, instructors can use the journal to
identify external challenges or barriers (Orem, 2001) that present challenges to learner persistence.

If an instructor chooses to read and assess learning through journal writing, deciding how to conceptualize the learning progression in the journals can be challenging. Kember and colleagues have devised and tested a coding framework to assess reflective thinking in journal writing using seven dimensions: habitual action, introspection, thoughtful action, content reflection, process reflection, content and process reflection, and premise reflection (1999). Any assessment or grading of journals should be done with confidentiality and privacy in mind (Kerka, 2002) and instructors should always keep their roles as evaluators and instructors in mind when reading personal journals. Some guidelines for how to do this are included in section 3.5, as developed by English (2001).

### 3.3 Implementation of Online Journaling

There are multiple forms that journals may take, including learning journals, diaries, reading journals, or personal history or narrative (Hiemstra, 2001), though the forms are of varying utility. Journal can be intimidating, however, and some learners may be resistant to sharing personal thoughts and feelings. Instructors can encourage students to overcome their fears of reflective journaling by providing guidelines, prompts, or open-ended questions (Kerka, 2002; Peterson and Jones, 2001), or through techniques designed to overcome writer’s block (for example, free-association, setting aside specific time devoted only to writing (Hiemstra, 2001). Journals can also be group exercises that can help foster community online (Kerka, 2002) and even develop help learners to develop agency and self-determination (Orem, 2001).

The Center for Social Policy developed a weekly set of guiding questions for 16 weeks to be used for online journaling and piloted these questions with a sample of GED students. These questions have been included on page 34. The students were asked to write their journals every week using the guiding questions. The CSP then revised and refined some of the question on the basis of the analyses of the journaling responses by students.
The journal questions cover a variety of topics ranging from, life goals and motivation, to use of learning strategies, study habits, time management and feelings about reading or writing. The weekly questions follow a deliberate sequence and have a progression. Some questions are revisited after a period of time. The questions seek to create a reflection process which can lead to self knowledge, knowledge of strategies used in learning and knowledge about the application of these strategies. The questions seek also to initiate a process whereby students are thinking about planning, monitoring and evaluation of their learning processes. Used this way, the online journaling constitutes another instructional resource for supporting and monitoring students’ progress in their knowledge of the subject matter, communication and awareness of their meta-cognitive skills. It will help students enhance their ability to own their learning processes.

Online journaling questions can be used as weekly or bi-weekly supplementary assignments for students; enough time should be given to students in between each set of questions. The questions can be sent to students individually via e-mail or they can be uploaded on a space created specifically for this purpose, for example, on Moodle and students can be directed to the questions. Individual or collective feedback can be provided to students throughout the process via emails based on topics and issues that are emerging. Instructors should be cognizant about issues of privacy and confidentiality when responding to the journals collectively.

It is also important that regardless of what role instructors assume in responding to the journals, students are assured in the beginning that their journals are being read. The instructor should also establish a code also in the beginning of online as to when or how feedback will be given and communicate this to students.

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3 A course management system.
3.4 Roles of Response  

Within the three modes of response—peer, facilitator or supervisor, or self— are different possible roles through which to listen and respond to a journal writer’s exploratory writing:

- **As a comforter.** The responder affirms and bolsters the writer’s strengths and interests, counters self put-downs, and sometimes offers insight about larger structural issues contributing to a problem the journal writer assumes to be self-contained.

- **As a mirror.** The responder reflects the writer’s own themes, recurring images and questions, and gems of thought that appear throughout the journal. Sometimes simply selecting and noting these with a brief comment is sufficient to be helpful.

- **As a provoker.** The responder offers challenges and critical questions, perhaps drawing attention to faulty logic or gaps in thinking, pointing out contradictions in different parts of the writing, or commenting on assumptions contained in the writer’s metaphors. This role must be played gently and carefully, and usually only with the writer’s permission. Critical commentary without mutual trust can block further writing.

- **As a learning director.** The responder notes conclusions or potential lessons from experience that are emerging in the writing, perhaps suggesting application or implications for further learning. Or the responder may draw attention to the change over the course of the journal itself, perhaps offering language to assist the writer to see the learning process unfolding.

- **As a friend-in-dialogue.** The responder simply extends conversational response, commenting on parts the responder can relate to or agrees with and why, parts that are puzzling, personal stories in kind the responder is stimulated to share by the journal, and even advice.
• **As an evaluator.** The responses offer constructive assistance to help sharpen the writer’s thinking, writing, or learning as recorded in the journal, according to specific criteria that have been made clear at the beginning of the process.

• **As a biographer.** The responder creates or shows the story of a life that has emerged in the journal and points out the ways in which the story has been specifically constructed according to a frame of values and assumptions. In other words, the responder opens the door for “re-storing” of the narrative. Choices among these roles depend on the journal’s purpose, the journal writer’s intentions and needs, and the responder’s relationship with the journal writer. In all cases, responders should approach their task delicately, as invited guests in another’s world, appreciating the gift of another’s personal writing, and desiring to give in return.

### 3.5 Principles to Govern the Use of Journal Writing

[From Leona M. English, 2001, *Ethical Concerns Relating to Journal Writing*]

The following guidelines, based on Brockett’s (1990) discussion of ethical principles, can help adult educators who use journal writing in their practice.

• **Respect.** The educator needs to ask first and foremost: How can I implement journal writing in such a way that I respect the students with whom I work? This principle puts the learner’s best interests first and makes confidentiality and boundary setting essential characteristics of a journal writing exercise. This principle ensures that there are no major obstacles to a student’s privacy.

• **Justice.** This principle ensures that there is equity in service to learners. One way that this principle is put in practice is to ensure that journals submitted for assessment are responded to in a reasonable time. This principle ensures that adult educators who use journal writing in their courses focus on journals as learning tools, not as vehicles for therapy. The purpose of the journal based on this principle is to assist in learning knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
• **Beneficence (promoting good).** This principle means that the learners’ opportunities for positive outcomes are maximized. A good way to operationalize this principle when the journal writing is assigned is for the educator to ask, are harmful outcomes minimized and positive outcomes maximized? Do I guard the journal entries and make sure these are not shared with others? Do I treat journal entries with the utmost respect? Am I using journals as a way to increase the potential for learning?

• **Self-awareness.** This principle, perhaps the most challenging, is one of mutuality. It requests educators, provided they are willing and ready, to do what they have asked their students to do. Are they willing to engage in a process of reflection on their own adult education practice? If they are, adult educators must keep a journal and share their experiences of the process (not necessarily the content) of the journal writing if they are to model reflective practice for their learners. It is important to the integrity of the process if educators do what they expect of the student.

• **Caring.** This principle requires educators to think seriously about whether they really care about the students with whom they work. Caring will be evident in a clear demarcation of roles and expectations. This happens when adult educators inform students from the outset about the purpose of journal writing, provide guidelines for the task, and explain how the journals will be evaluated. The assessment process should be clearly defined, especially in terms of what the teacher will or will not read.
### WEEKLY ONLINE-JOURNALING QUESTIONS FOR GED STUDENTS

#### Week 1: Identifying goals and motivation

*This week we would like you to think about the question, “Why am I doing this?”*

- Describe why it is important for you to attend this program.
- Do you have plans for when you complete this program? What are those?

#### Week 2: Thinking ahead challenges and how to overcome them; what’s the big plan?

*This week we would like you to ask yourself, “How am I going to do this?” We would like you to think and write about your overall plan for completing this program and reaching your goals.*

- What are some things you think might make it hard for you to finish this course?
- *Think of a time when you felt frustrated or discouraged in the past when trying to accomplish something. How did you handle it? What helped you? What didn’t help?
- *What can you do if you feel discouraged or frustrated in this course?*
- *Who are the people in your life who can support you while you study GED?
- What else in your life would help you to reach your goal?

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4 All questions marked with an asterisk were originally developed by GED instructor Cathy Coleman at Quinsigamond Community College.
Week 3: Study Habits— planning your time and a space for studying

This week the journal topic is study habits.

- When studying it is helpful to have a place set up for you to do your work. In distance learning, it's even more important since you do not have a classroom. Do you have a good place to study? What makes it a good place to study? If it isn't a good place to study, what might you do to make it a better place where you can study?

- What do you do to get prepared for studying? For example, describe how you organize your time to complete your weekly assignments. Do you use a planner, schedule or calendar to organize your time?

- Do you set goals or make lists of what you need to do each day? Why or why not?

- So far, do you feel like you have enough time set aside to complete the assigned work every week? Please explain why or why not.

Week 4: Thinking about challenges and support

Our journal topic this week is support, and what kinds of support you have and may need.

- Have you had any problems using the computer for this course? For example, has there been a time when you tried to study or do an assignment and you couldn't because of the computer/software? Were there times where you had trouble with the speakers, printer, internet, or downloading the course material? Please describe what happened. How did you handle this situation?

- What supports does the GED program offer? Have you used any of these so far? Write about some ways these tools might be helpful for you.

- Describe some other sources of knowledge or information that are available to you outside of the program; for example, a library, the internet, or a community center. Do you feel comfortable getting information from these sources? Did you use any of these sources this week?
### Week 5: Feelings about distance learning, opportunities and challenges

**The journal topic this week is how you feel about distance learning so far.**

- How is distance learning going for you? What are the opportunities? Please give examples of opportunities.
- Are there any difficulties in learning this way? Can you give an example?

### Week 6: Coursework

**This week’s journal is about coursework.**

- Are you happy with the coursework so far? What works about the coursework and what does not work?
- If you could change something about the coursework, what would it be?

### Week 7: Learning strategies

**This week the journal is about the different ways we study and learn.**

- Many students have found ways to help themselves learn or understand course material. For example, some people like to practice things until they remember them. Others make up their own examples to help them understand important ideas and information. Other people try to relate what they are learning to what they already know.
- Do you have examples like this you can share to help others learn?
- Write about the thing you are most proud of learning so far. Describe how you learned it, and why it worked well.
### Week 8: Communicating with the instructor and other students in the program, and how could this help?

**This week, think about the ways you talk about your coursework or issues related to your coursework with others.**

- In the past month, have you e-mailed, called on the phone, or spoken with other students about coursework or assignments? Give an example of how you communicate with other students, and how it has affected your learning.
- What are your thoughts about phoning or emailing your instructor?

### Week 9: Follow-up—Organizing time and study habits

**This week we are following up on your planning and study habits, and how they may be changing. (You talked about this in your journal in week 3.)**

- How is your study space working for you? Do you need to make changes? What do you need to do?
- Have you made changes in your way of managing the time you spend for your studies? What is your way to manage your time? Do you have specific times set aside for studying every week?
- What do you do when you feel lazy and do not feel like studying?
### Week 10: Follow-up—Learning strategies

*Research shows that new things are learned better when we connect them to things we know already. This week we would like you to think about the things you have learned so far, and what helped you to learn them.*

- *Think of something you learned in math in the past weeks which helped you in your everyday life. When have you used math in your life this week? For example, have you used math in a new way while shopping, paying bills, or cooking? How have you used math in a new way with your children or with other family members? How have you used it in your job?*
- *Write about the way you used math in these new ways, and how you think it might help you learn.*

### Week 11: Reading

*Some people like reading a lot and they learn better through reading. Some others do not enjoy reading that much. Studying for the GED requires a lot of reading. Understanding why you like and dislike reading and thinking about ways which would make it easier for you to read might help. Thus, the journal this week is about reading.*

- *Do you like to read? If so, what is it about reading that you like? What kinds of things do you like to read? What do you read on a regular basis?*
- *If you don't like to read, what is it about reading that you dislike the most? What is hardest for you about reading?*
- *What do you remember about reading as a child or while you were in school? Can you think of things which would make reading easier for you? Changing the light, a quieter environment? Books with more pictures, graphs, charts?*
### Week 12: Follow-up—Life-management, challenges, and support from others

*In the second week of this journal we asked you to think and write about your overall plan for completing this program and reaching your goals. This week we would like to revisit that plan and see how it might have changed.*

- Write about your time commitments, for example, work, family, church, or friends. Have any of these other responsibilities made studying difficult? Have any of them helped you to focus on studying?
- Have the people around you supported you? In what ways? Any surprises?
- Have you experienced any problems in your relationships due to your studies? What can you do to overcome these problems?

### Week 13: Writing

*Journaling is a way to reflect on what we learn. Research shows that journaling might actually help you learn better. Some people are comfortable with writing and it helps them to think and learn. For others writing can be a challenge.*

*Thus, the journal this week is about writing.*

- *What has been your experience with writing in the past? Have you enjoyed writing? Have you disliked writing?*
- *What do you think are your biggest strengths in writing?*
- *How about your biggest challenges?*
- How do you feel about the online journaling experience? In what ways was it useful to you? Which questions did you have most difficulty with?
- Has the online journal helped you learn? Why or why not? How?
### Week 14: Follow-up—Challenges/Supports

This week’s topic is looking back on ways you got help, and the things that were not available to you. You first wrote about this topic in Week 4.

- Looking back, what program supports have you used the most? What did you find most helpful?
- Can you think of supports that were not offered by the program that would have helped you? Think of one area you are having difficulty with and imagine how your instructor, program or other students could help you.

### Week 15: Follow-up—Learning strategies and study habits

On weeks 7 and 10 you gave examples of ways which made learning easier for you. On weeks 3 and 9 you talked about your study habits; on how you plan and organize your studying. This week’s journal is about how these may have changed.

- Did you make any changes in the way you study in the past weeks which helped you to understand/learn the material better? What were they? Why? Please explain.
- Have you discovered anything new about your strengths and weaknesses? What are the surprises? How will this knowledge help you move on?
- What would you advise someone who is just starting the program on how to study?
This week is the last week of journaling and we would like you to go back to the first two weeks of your journal and read what you wrote. Please answer the following questions about your experiences.

- In the first week of journaling we asked you about your goals. Has there been a moment that made you feel like you are closer to your goals? Please describe that moment.
- Has there been a moment that made you feel like you are not making progress. Please describe that moment.
- Now, please look at the plan you made in week 2. How has that plan worked for you? Do you need to make revisions? What are those?
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Online Journaling


