**ABSTRACT**
This study examined the efficacy of general education development (GED®) acquisition and GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness and social capital using a quantitative methodology. Also, the study used a descriptive, cross-sectional research design framed by the social capital theoretical perspective. The conceptual framework developed for the study emphasized the relationship between five central issues: adult literacy, general education development completion, college readiness, post-secondary education, and social capital. The findings indicated that there is not a significant relationship between literacy level and perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The findings support the conclusion that for GED® completers, particularly those who may not be experiencing success in college, becoming college ready and attempting to produce social capital requires more than self-concepts and feelings of being valued in society.

**INTRODUCTION**
Literate adults contribute economic, political, social and cultural elements to communities and society. Adults in the United States are expected to successfully perform literacy tasks in order to adequately function, that is, to meet personal and employment goals as well as contribute to the community (White & Dillon, 2005). Conventional wisdom has it that even the most basic jobs in the United States today, for example, require workers to speak in English so others can understand them, to use basic math skills to solve problems, to be able to use a computer and other electronic equipment, and to have the ability to follow basic work procedures. These basic requirements often pose a barrier to employment and community involvement for adults with limited literacy skills. Communities have a stake in the literacy capabilities of their citizens because literate adults are able to participate more fully in the life of their community and contribute to its economic, social, and educational health (Fingeret, 1983).

While many researchers have examined the high school to 4-year college transition, few have examined the high school to community college transition. Even fewer have examined the transition experiences of GED® completers, who have participated in an adult literacy education (ALE) program, and have decided to continue their learning in post-secondary education on a community college campus; thus the need for this study.
For this research, low literacy as a hindrance to an individual's perception of college readiness and the ability to produce social capital was argued. Understanding the impact of adult literacy, the potential of adult literacy education (ALE) programs to encourage more college-going, and the production of social capital as a means of improving quality of life, is essential in the debate regarding adult literacy. The following research questions and sub-questions were addressed by using a researcher-developed survey: (1) what are GED completers' perceptions regarding college readiness; (2) what are GED completers' perceptions regarding social capital? (a) What is the relationship between literacy level of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness; (b) what is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perception of the production of social capital? (c) Do GED completers' perceptions of college readiness differ by literacy level; and, (d) do GED completers' perceptions of social capital differ by literacy level?

**RATIONALE**

This study is significant because it contributes to the current discussions regarding adult literacy education theory and practice, college readiness skills and knowledge, and the production of social capital through attainment of knowledge. A gap existed in the literature where the components of adult literacy and GED completion were not correlated to or associated with perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The empirical and theoretical literature was minimal, at best. The available literature had focused primarily on the effects of socioeconomic status (SES), race and gender on adult literacy rates, the economic benefits associated with GED acquisition, and the theoretical definitions of social capital.

This study was designed to focus on the relationship between adult literacy development and GED acquisition, make a connection to the GED credential and college readiness behaviors and skills and the production of social capital, and determine if entry into postsecondary education was influenced by college readiness and social capital factors. This study was conducted to assist ALE/GED program planners, secondary education and community college curriculum designers, and higher education (community college) administrators and policy makers in recognizing the issues and concerns surrounding adult literacy and the possible implications for the Greater New Orleans area. In addition, this study had policy implications for further evaluation and subsequent improvement of ALE/GED programs in order to facilitate improvement in adult literacy rates, increase college readiness skills, and enhance the level of social capital of GED completers.

**SOCIAL CAPITAL**

The theoretical framework for this study, social capital theory, was used in order to highlight the connection between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital is a residual or side effect of social interactions, and an enabler of future transactions; like many other aspects of social life, it is not only produced, but also reproduced (Resnick, 2000). According to Inkeles (2000), “social capital is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common; they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (p. 247). Social capital is
productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence (Inkeles, 2000).

Falk and Kilpatrick’s (2000) model of social capital was used as a guide to develop a conceptual framework that graphically represents the concepts examined in this study and their relationships (See Figure 1). The constructs of social capital used in this study, individual dispositions (skill development through adult education, aspirations, and self-concept) and community connectedness (participation in community action activities, community development processes, and building social networks) are discussed.

In attempting to correlate social capital to low adult literacy skills, it is necessary to discuss how researchers have investigated the connections between these two concepts. Bourdieu’s (1986) and Coleman’s (1988) seminal work on social capital and human capital concluded that educational activities and practices are community resources and important aspects of social capital. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society. We, like Bourdieu and Coleman, believe that human capital, as a form of social capital, enhances community and societal engagement and leads to increased production of social capital.

Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk (2003) theorized that the value of social capital for community development is threefold; it represented an existing set of resources within the community based on intervention, a public good goal in its own right, and a resource that could contribute towards sustained autonomous development after the intervention was complete. Community capacity was hypothesized as an emergent outcome that sprang from the social capital generated from...
the actions and interactions within and between formal and informal networks; these formal and informal networks were considered to operate like “turbines,” which are “polycentric” rather than centralized or pyramidal in their production of social capital (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, and Nelson, 2000). The extent to which they produced social capital, which was the social energy for building community capacity, varied (Morse, 1998).

Social capital theory was used to frame the issue of low literacy in order to highlight the connection between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Our assumption was that an increase in adult literacy led to the production or activation of social capital. The constructs of social capital used to operationalize the relationships in the study were control and self-efficacy (individual dispositions), and participation, social engagement, and commitment (community connectedness). Ruston (2002) uncovered these constructs when analyzing surveys used to measure social capital. The constructs emerged as five themes (participation, social engagement, and commitment; control and self-efficacy; perception of community level structures or characteristics; social interaction, social networks, and social support; and trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion) which were grouped together to connect the relevant indicators of social capital (Ruston, 2000). Ruston concluded that these five themes were the most widely used indicators of social capital when used for analysis. The themes were then used to create a matrix highlighting the major indicators of social capital.

The individual dispositions of control and self-efficacy, as evidenced in the study, were the individual’s self-processes that included confidence and aspirations in help-seeking (education, advice, and training from ALE participation) and self-improvement (literacy, GED® completion, and being college ready). In addition, we believed that GED® completers possessed the social aspects (interaction, networking and support) needed to integrate into post-secondary education. The production of social capital (community connectedness) manifested itself as increased civic and community participation, engagement, and commitment in order to develop and maintain useful social networks. Three existing social capital frameworks (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2008; Bullen, 2007; Franke, 2005) were examined and components of each were used to conceptualize the constructs for our study. Within the context of the AERA (2008) model, individual dispositions and self-processes were linked to school-based forms of social capital (human capital) in order to produce the mediating variables used to provide individuals with more valuable forms of social capital.

**College Readiness**

Two of the five dimensions from Conley’s (2005) work were used in the study to identify college readiness, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and knowledge. Academic behaviors reflect greater self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control; these behaviors tend to be more completely independent of a particular content area (Conley, 2007a). Contextual skills and awareness included a systematic understanding of the post-secondary educational system combined with specific knowledge of the norms, values, and conventions of interactions in the college context; also, the human relations skills necessary to cope within this system even if it is very different from the community the student has just left (Conley, 2007b), hence, the term “college knowledge.”
It was important for us to make a distinction between being academically college ready and being knowledgeable about college. Both forms of college readiness include knowing that college is an option, having the maturity to understand college processes (i.e., the registration process, academic advising, and financial aid procedures), and understanding how to socially adapt into the college environment through interactions with others. The interactions are the beginnings of the activation or production of social capital. Our assumption was that when individuals with GED® credentials enter post-secondary education knowing that college is an option (contextual skills and awareness), and having the self-confidence (academic behaviors) to pursue such an undertaking, successful entry into and subsequent completion of post-secondary education endeavors will be attained.

The decision to use these two dimensions of college readiness primarily stemmed from our experiences as community college, developmental education instructors. Before a first-time college student, especially those who are academically underprepared, can develop content knowledge and cognitive strategies, he/she must be able to understand the context and culture of college going, as well as, possess the maturity to self-manage through the initial college process and integrate into the college community.

Without specific behaviors, skills, and knowledge in place, we believed that entry into post-secondary education is difficult for GED® completers, if not impossible. Researchers have, both theoretically and empirically, used all four dimensions of Conley’s model to frame issues of college readiness. However, we found no existing empirical studies using academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness solely as constructs for research.

For this analysis, the researchers used a quantitative methodological approach to complete this descriptive, cross-sectional study. An explanatory, quantitative design offered a more comprehensive explanation and examination of GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness, social capital and the relationship to literacy. GED® completers were asked about their feelings, attitudes and beliefs of college readiness and social capital during a three-month period.

To address research questions (1) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding college readiness and (2) what are GED® completers’ perceptions regarding social capital, and present the characteristics of the sample, we used descriptive statistics. Next, an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factor analysis (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation was conducted to answer sub-questions (a) what is the relationship between literacy level of GED® completers and their perceptions of college readiness and (b) what is the relationship between literacy levels of GED® completers and their perception of the production of social capital? PAF was used to determine the survey items that defined the latent variables of the study; college readiness and social capital. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, all items with cross loadings at or over .40 and any items that did not factor load at .40 were eliminated. Within the data analysis procedure, a scale score was calculated based on the factor analysis.

After the scale score was calculated, a multiple regression analysis was used to answer sub-questions (a) and (b), to compare scores within groups, and to determine if perceptions of college readiness and social capital could be predicted from literacy level. Prior to computing the multiple regressions, the independent variables
for correlation were checked using Pearson’s correlation coefficient in the bivariate procedure. Multiple regressions were conducted on each literacy level group—6-8.9 (Group 4), 9-10.9 (Group 5), and 11-12.9 (Group 6). The college readiness and social capital scores that emerged from the PAF were used as dependent variables. Group comparisons were based on calculated factor scores. Regression was appropriate for this study because it was exploratory and it helped to explain if literacy level, the independent variable, was important.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to answer sub-questions (c) do GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness differ by literacy level; and, (d) do GED® completers’ perceptions of social capital differ by literacy level? The ANOVA was used to determine if significant differences existed between the means of the three sample groups of GED® completers (literacy levels of TABE) and their perceptions of college readiness and social capital. For the purpose of this study, the post-test score of the TABE was considered the overall literacy level of the participants. The TABE is the official measure of educational progress in adult literacy programs in the Greater New Orleans area and throughout the United States. The TABE assesses competencies in reading, math, and language skills. It was designed to measure the acquisition of skills normally obtained from the second grade through high school graduation (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996).

The post-test data was collected from participant records and assessed through a single item, Question 8, in the demographic section of the survey for recording TABE scores. The post-test score was self-reported, if known, or gathered from participant files by the researchers and administrative assistants. The researchers verified self-reported scores from identifiers that were cross-referenced to names of participants in the databases. The data was used for accountability purposes for each ALE/GED® program. The researchers assured confidentiality by not discussing or disseminating any specifics gathered from these records. The researchers were given permission to review student files by each program director for research purposes only.

DATA SOURCE

The 321 subjects used for the study were derived from the target population (N=1050) of GED® completers currently enrolled in entry-level, post-secondary education courses at two area community colleges. The entire populations of GED® participants at (N=600) Delgado Community College (DCC) and (N=450) Nunez Community College (NCC) were accessible and available to the researchers; therefore, sampling was not necessary. According to Patten (2004) and Zemke and Kramlinger (1986), for a population of 1000-1100, with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5, a sample size of 277-284 is sufficient to make generalizations to the entire population. Therefore, the sample size of 321 is acceptable to generalize to the population of GED® completers at NCC and DCC.

A database of potential participants, (N=1050), currently enrolled in two local community colleges during the academic years from 2009-2012, was created. Participants were contacted through phone, email, mail outs, and face-to-face interviews. This effort yielded a study sample (n=321) designed to be representative of all GED® completers enrolled in entry-level college courses. The usable response rate was 42%. The instrument created for this study was a self-reporting, two-part questionnaire consisting of 76 items designed
to elicit the respondents’ demographic attributes and attitudes towards college readiness and social capital.

The first dependent variable, college readiness, was assessed through the factors of academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness. Questionnaire items for college readiness were developed and justified through the research presented by Conley (2007). Social capital, the second dependent variable of the study, was assessed through the factors of individual dispositions and community connectedness. The AERA (2008) report and Bullen (2007) rationalized social capital factors. The independent variable for the study was literacy level. The purpose of the study was to examine if and how literacy level had the potential to predict college readiness and social capital of GED® completers enrolled in post-secondary education. No evidence was found that other studies used literacy level as a variable in the examination of college readiness and social capital.

Part one of the questionnaire, (Q1–Q9), gathered demographic attributes that characterized the sample. Part two of the survey consisted of 65 statements, (Q10–Q74), rated on a 4-point Likert scale and developed to assess the perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The perception ratings ranged from a high score of four for strongly agree, to a low score of one for strongly disagree. Two open-ended questions on the survey were used to lend qualitative support to the findings of the quantitative analysis, and to provide a foundation for future qualitative research of the same constructs in order to gain a deeper and more meaningful insight into this phenomenon.

In developing items for the questionnaire, a panel of experts were enlisted consisting of both ALE/GED® program directors, three colleagues from each community college (six total), and our dissertation committee members in order to assure content validity. This panel of experts reviewed the items and provided suggestions that were used to revise the first draft. All of the experts were familiar with the concepts involved and the educational research used to establish reliability of the researcher-developed survey.

A pilot field test of the instrument was conducted, in order to gain feedback from (n=10) GED® completers enrolled in entry-level courses at one of the community colleges, to ensure face validity of the instrument. A pilot test had to be conducted to test both the instrument and the survey procedures before the actual survey was conducted (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). We used the feedback from the pilot test to modify the instrument as needed. GED® completers were interviewed to identify their perceptions of college readiness and social capital as assessed by the survey questionnaire. Upon completion of the survey, questions were categorized in order to determine one score for each construct or factor. Reliability and consistency in administration of the survey was maintained and documented accordingly. Feedback collected was used to rewrite the second and final questionnaire used in this study, thus, ensuring the applicability of questions asked to GED® completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education.

RESULTS
In order to examine the factor structure of the items within survey questions ten through seventy-four, PAF with direct oblimin rotation was used. Survey questions were factored separately because each focused on a different domain of college readiness and social capital. The latent root criterion (eigenvalues) and the scree plot criterion were also
examined. Variables that clustered into groups combined to create the final items that make up the College Readiness/Social Capital Scale (CRSCS). The determinant was acceptable at 3.81E-009 (0.000000000381). The assumption of independent sampling was met (KMO=.791). The Bartlett test was highly significant at .000. Factor 1 represents the construct of college readiness: attitudes, knowledge, awareness, and behaviors. Factor 2 represents the construct of social capital: individual dispositions and community connectedness. After rotation, the first factor accounted for 22.7% of the variance and the second factor accounted for 6.9% of the variance.

Cronbach's alpha computed for each factor scale and for the combined CRSCS was acceptable at α = .894. The alphas for each of the four individual factor scales showed reasonable internal consistency reliability. The twenty-five items that were summed to create the academic behavior score formed a reliable scale with an acceptable α = .817. Similarly, the alpha for the contextual skills and awareness scale (α = .700), the individual dispositions scales (α = .789), and the community connectedness scale (α = .850) were acceptable and indicated good internal consistency.

To answer sub-questions (a & b), Pearson correlation was calculated r (281) = .053, p = .375, indicating that the correlation was not significant and had no effect. The correlation for perceptions of social capital yielded similar results at, r (281) = -.071, p = .425. Next, linear regression was conducted to investigate how well literacy level predicts perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The results were not statistically significant for perceptions of college readiness F (1,281) = 1.427, p = .233. The adjusted R² value was .002; which indicated that less than 1% (.2%) of the variance in perceptions of social capital was explained by literacy level. Regression results for perceptions of social capital yielded similar results, F (1,281) = 1.427, p = .233. The adjusted R² value was .002; which indicated that less than 1% (.2%) of the variance in perceptions of social capital was explained by literacy level.

Finally, simultaneous multiple regression models were conducted to investigate the best predictors of perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The combination of variances to predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital from literacy level, education history (highest K-12 grade completed), age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant, F (5, 277) = 12.734, p<.001 for perceptions of college readiness; and F (5, 277) = 5.857, p<.001 for perceptions of social capital. Tables 1 & 2 present the regression results for college readiness and social capital. Gender and ethnicity could significantly predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital when all five variables (literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity) were included. The adjusted R² values were .172 and .079, respectively.

Sub-questions (c & d) were answered using two analyses of variance (ANOVAs). A statistically significant difference was found among the three literacy levels on perceptions of college readiness, F (2, 280) = 5.332, p= .005 (See Table 1); and on social capital, F (2, 280) = 7.961, p=.000 (See Table 2). The Levene statistic indicates that both factor scores are significant at p< .05 and p< .01; therefore, the assumption of equal variance is violated. Additionally, the between group differences for perceptions of college readiness and social capital are significant (p< .05).

Table 3 summarizes the one-way ANOVA between and within group comparisons for perceptions of college readiness and perceptions of social capital. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests
Table 1—*Regression Results for College Readiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Level</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.038*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education History</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.077*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.123*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.826</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.386**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.182*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.200</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01   R² = .172   F (5,277) = 12.734, p < .001*

Table 2—*Regression Results for Social Capital*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Level</td>
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<td>.028</td>
<td>.006*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education History</td>
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<td>.040</td>
<td>.038*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.147*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.221*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>.523</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01   R² = .079 F (5,277) = 5.857, p < .001*

Table 3—*ANOVA Summary Table/College Readiness and Social Capital*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of College Readiness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.432</td>
<td>4.467</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>245.29</td>
<td>.876</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>254.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Social Capital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>240.21</td>
<td>.858</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>253.87</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Table comparing literacy level groups on perceptions of college readiness and social capital.*

indicated that the low literacy level group (6-8.9) and the high literacy level group (11-12.9) differed significantly in their perceptions of social capital (p< .05). Likewise, there were also significant mean differences on college readiness between the medium literacy level group (9-10.9) and high literacy level group (11-12.9) (p<.05) using the same Post hoc Tukey HSD test.

Two open-ended questions, designed to substantiate the findings of the quantitative analysis, were incorporated at the end of the survey. Thematic analysis was used to categorize
and code responses.

Item 75 prompted participants to “explain what your successful entry into college means to you”. Four themes emerged from the responses:

1. Can better my life, 97 responses (55%);
2. Improve my work/career, 62 responses (35%);
3. Means a better future for self/family, 120 responses (69%); and,
4. Have many other opportunities, 88 responses (50%).

Item 76 asked: describe how you participate in your community. Five themes emerged from the responses:

1. Give myself to help others, 115 responses (66%);
2. Volunteer at centers and shelters, 78 responses (45%);
3. Volunteer with kids, 162 responses (92%);
4. Feed the homeless, 59 responses (34%); and,
5. I do not participate, 43 responses (25%).

**DISCUSSION**

Whether GED® completers had, on average, good attitudes toward college readiness and social capital, data collected indicated that literacy level had a very small, if any, effect on their perceptions. Clearly, the original items on the College Readiness and Social Capital Scale designed for this study were not as reliable as first thought. This instrument might best be utilized as part of a more comprehensive study that includes other demographic factors of influence.

An analysis of responses collected also indicated that GED® completers’ age and gender were statistically significant with regard to perceptions of college readiness and social capital. In contrast, the correlations and regressions of literacy level in association with college readiness and social capital, had no significant relationships. Moreover, the ANOVA did reveal a slight significance in the factor scores of college readiness and social capital.

The main goal of this study was not necessarily to generalize the data collected to all GED® completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Rather, the interest was in identifying whether literacy level predicted perceptions of college readiness and social capital. As such, generalizing the data to all GED® completers should be done with caution, given that some findings may reflect bias, since data analyzed was based on GED® completers’ perceptions. Additional research focusing on GED® completers’ successful entry and completion of post-secondary education, should be carried out to support the results of this study and provide a basis for generalizations.

Given the fact that most respondents thought that college was an important step, the results of the study did not support this view. College going is a form of knowledge acquisition and theorizes that adult learners gain human, as well as, social capital from participation in post-secondary education (Baycich, 2003; Boesel, 1998; Murnane et al., 2000). Pearson correlation indicated that TABE post-test literacy level had no effect on college readiness and social capital perceptions. In addition, the variables did not have a significant correlation.

Multiple regression analyses were employed in order to determine the best predictors of college readiness and social capital. A combination of literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant. However, only gender and ethnicity were found to significantly predict college readiness and social capital when all
five variables were included. Perhaps an individual’s economic, cultural or symbolic capital may have a negative effect on how they value education and how they see themselves participating in society.

Although our results cannot be generalized beyond this study, the following conclusions can be cautiously drawn from the research: that adult literacy is still a major concern, especially for the Greater New Orleans area, and the rebuilding effort. The results indicated that there is no systematic association of literacy level to college readiness and social capital; however, there was a determination that gender and ethnicity could significantly predict college readiness and social capital. It may be that for GED® completers, particularly those who may not be experiencing success in college, becoming college ready and attempting to produce social capital requires more than just those self-concepts and feelings of being valued in society. Due to the results of the regression analyses on college readiness and social capital, all factors of college readiness and social capital should play a key role in examining GED® completers’ perceptions. There is a definite need for attention to adult literacy education programs and high school curricula, in our area and nationwide, in preparing participants for post-secondary education.

Overall, the results of the study indicated that there is not a significant relationship between literacy level, college readiness and social capital. This was an unexpected outcome. Results of the correlation and regression analyses showed no significant effects or correlations to the variables; thus, not supportive of our initial hypotheses that there existed a significant relationship between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Surprisingly, these findings were not in agreement with existing literature (Bernardo, 2000; Fingeret, 1983; Hamilton, 2006; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Scribner, 1984; Torres, 1994; Wagner, 1992) that concluded that literacy activities and practices are community resources and important aspects of social capital. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society. Additionally, the findings did not support using social capital theory to frame the study and showing how the acquisition of knowledge (human capital) can lead to the development of social networks.

Our assumptions that there is a significant relationship among adult literacy development (GED® completion), entry into post-secondary education (college readiness), and the production of social capital; and, that adult learners perceive that they are college ready and are able to produce social capital as a result of increased knowledge, were not supported by the findings. The results were in contrast to the findings of Tyler et al. (2000), which reported that acquisition of a GED® could lead to higher average levels of human capital through increased access to post-secondary education. Tyler et al. (2000) found that acquisition of the GED® leads to higher earnings and greater probability of employment. Therefore, concluding that literacy is not a significant factor of social capital was quite surprising. Again, our hypothesis that knowledge resources (human capital) are a catalyst to achieving greater individual fulfillment and community involvement was not supported.

The ANOVA did result in statistically significant differences among the three literacy levels. This finding could indicate that GED® scores can be used as predictors of college readiness, but perhaps not of social capital. Although the results cannot be interpreted as solely due to the influence of literacy on college readiness and social capital, it was supported by the work of Joost (2009).
The researcher explored how GED® scores in the domains of reading and math might be predictive of college readiness skills (Joost, 2009).

Our findings indicated that the concepts of literacy, college readiness and social capital are more complex than initially perceived for this study. When examining literacy, the factors that affect literacy development must be taken into account. For example, generational illiteracy, functional literacy, and illiteracy should be comprehensively investigated on individual cases to determine how literacy affects an individual’s perceptions. If college readiness was used as a variable for investigation, each of the four key dimensions (key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness) could be explored for their predictive power. Although social capital has been widely used for research, exploring all forms of social capital would provide an in-depth understanding of its structure and theoretical utility.

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations to the study. First, the findings could not be generalized beyond GED® completers currently enrolled at two community colleges located in the Greater New Orleans area. The small effect sizes of the correlations between the variables were also a limitation, as well as the possibility that participant self-reported responses were due to factors other than those present in the community college setting. For example, generational illiteracy and apathy towards education could have affected participant responses negatively. Finally, the small sample size created a limitation in the generalizability as well.

Additional limitations were related to instrumentation, data collection methods, and the length and depth of the study. First, the instrument used for data collection was created by the researchers and therefore increased potential threats to validity. Although several related surveys and questionnaires were examined to determine appropriate wording and design, participants may not have interpreted the survey items consistently. Secondly, because we used multiple methods for the data collection process, there was the potential danger of incorrect data entry. Our intent was to gather as many participants for the study as possible, given the preferences of how they received the survey. Lastly, the study was limited to one semester, which created a very short turnaround time between distribution of the survey and returns. Our study could have been stronger if, perhaps, an entire academic school year could have been feasible.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of our study contribute to the body of literature relating to college readiness and social capital. In addition, it contributes to the body of literature relating to literacy and adult literacy education. Given that the findings indicated no significant connection among literacy, college readiness and social capital, it does open the doors to further examination into social capital theory. Additional forms of social capital (i.e. human capital, cultural capital, economic capital) have also emerged as bodies of literature affected by the findings. The results also indicated that factors of college readiness and social capital are more complex, and should be studied both individually and collectively in order to draw more significant conclusions.

Policy implications include creating specialized policies for ALE/GED® programs that may meet the needs of participants in preparing for and understanding college choice. Policies focusing on
program planning and curriculum design should also be established for ALE/GED® programs to ensure seamless matriculation into post-secondary education. Policies should also include training and professional development for adult educators in ALE/GED® programs, colleges, and universities to better educate and support GED® completers.

The findings are also important for ALE/GED® program educators and for the public two-year post-secondary institutions in the Greater New Orleans area. Our suggestions for practical implications are based on the results of the study, as well as the findings of several other researchers. As such, high school and ALE program curriculum planners should take note of the research of Byrd, 2005; Cline et al., 2007; Conley, 2007c; Greene & Forster, 2003; Kuh, 2007 and their suggestions and strategies to help increase the numbers of college-ready students, and align their programs for college success. It is important that adequate collaboration and planning be implemented in order to improve alignment efforts. It is also important for educators to refine support systems so that high school students, as well as GED® completers, can transition successfully to a community college environment. ALE/GED® educators could use more support, resources, and training on strategies for increasing “college knowledge” and awareness.

Furthermore, ALE/GED® program directors should look for ways to give students information that would strengthen their academic behaviors and contextual knowledge in preparing them for a range of post-secondary opportunities. For GED® completers enrolled in college courses, the study may be able to inform adult educators about the value of supporting GED® completers in college, and provide ALE/GED® program planners insight regarding GED® completers’ perceptions of college readiness and social capital. K-12 educators could benefit from the findings by providing information to students regarding the disadvantages of dropping out, and encouraging persistence and completion of high school. K-12 educators should collaborate with ALE/GED® educators and college instructors to increase attention to the knowledge and benefits of college going.

REFERENCES


