

Connecting Research and Practice in Adult Basic Education

According to the publication, *Adult Learner Retention Revisited*, attrition is described as the #1 problem in Adult Basic Education. Rather than look at the reasons why adult learners drop out of programs, attention is being paid to understanding how to get students to persist. Research has followed along these lines.

Four supports to persistence:

1. Managing the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence.
2. Self-efficacy (about reaching goals).
3. Establishment of a goal by the student.
4. Progress toward reaching a goal.

More positive than negative forces affect persistence. Building up positive supports may be more critical to increasing persistence than the removal of barriers.

Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach Their Goals

Vita has developed a case management system to support and encourage students so that they persist in reaching their goals. This begins at the time of orientation and continues until they complete the program. Following is how research is incorporated into our case management model.

ORIENTATION

...cultivating a sense of belonging from the moment a prospective adult learner comes through the door or calls is an important persistence strategy.

Making it Worth the Stay

Goals are extremely important in motivating and directing behavior.

Austin and Vancouver

FIRST CLASS

A recurring theme is the crucial importance of the first few weeks, especially the first class. Quigley (1995) found that "reluctant learners" who drop out after the first few weeks were younger than persisters and were loners who felt they did not receive enough teacher attention.

Adult Learner Revisited

First, it is important for students to interact with their communities as they use literacy to research and solve problems.

Garner and Gillingham

FIRST CLASS

Involving students in a process of thinking about their motivation helps them persist in learning.

Since their goal is an important support to persistence, adult students must make progress toward reaching that goal, and they must be able to measure that progress.

A plan (written document) that sets out the goals would include a process to allow the student to judge his/her own progress.

Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach Their Goals

Students who are self-regulating—who set goals, make plans for reaching their goals, and then monitor and regulate their cognitions and behavior—are more likely to do well on academic tasks.

Improving Adult Literacy Instruction

FIRST CLASS INTERVIEW

One cause of early withdrawal is a gap between learner expectations and reality.

Hamann

WELCOME CALL

A phone call within the first 2 weeks increases retention.

Towles, Ellis, and Spencer, J.

If instructors emphasize mastery, effort, and improvement, then students will be more likely to adopt personal mastery goals

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CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

The strongest positive force mentioned by adult students was the support of people, particularly their families, friends, teacher, and fellow students, followed by self-efficacy and personal goals.

Some teachers take great care to develop a culture of support among students in their classes. These efforts ensure positive support for students.

Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes

Learning environments and experiences that help establish positive relations with others while developing competence in particular skills also shape motivation, and persistence.

National Research Council

MIDWAY CALL

Students who feel they are making progress are more likely to persist. They may need help recognizing and appreciating progress so that they persist.

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CONTACT INTERVIEW

Most adult learners flag in their persistence for good reasons. They stop coming or miss class due to changing work schedules, having to work two jobs, lack of reliable child care or transportation, poor health, need to take care of other family members, or just simple exhaustion. For the most part, these are forces beyond their or the program's control.

Making it Worth the Stay

Send letters to non-returning students twice.

1. You were missed. 2. Upcoming registration dates.

Adult Persistence in Learning Model

EXIT INTERVIEW

As students reach proximal goals and recognize that short-term achievements are the path toward reaching long-term goals, they will be motivated to set and work toward new goals and thus continue to learn. In contrast, if focused only on distal goals, students can become frustrated with what appears to be minimal progress, and so self-efficacy and then persistence may suffer.

To persist, learners need feedback and models that help frame their experiences with learning and develop adaptive explanations for successes and failures.

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