Here Today – Gone Tomorrow:

Why do they leave? How do we help them stay?

Strategies for Motivating & Retaining Adult Learners

April 23, 2014

Presented by
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We All Know The Issues…

❖ Here today, gone tomorrow!

Why don't our students stick around longer?

What do you think?

Tell us one reason why you think students leave your program early.

The Bottomline…

❖ There is no ONE reason why they leave.

❖ That's what makes student persistence such a challenge.

Today's Training Objectives

❖ Examine the latest research on learner persistence to determine factors that promote retention.
❖ Explore a variety of instructional and management strategies that address the research findings.
❖ Examine professional development options that can help instructors and tutors support student persistence.
❖ Outline a student persistence learning project to work on during the next three months.

Why is persistence so important?

Learner Persistence Study, NCSALL (2004)

GLE Increase	EFL Gains	Duration and Intensity
100 hours required for a 1 GLE increase	75 percent chance of making a 1+ GLE increase at 150 hours	Another gain after 250 – 300 hours

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Relationship of CASAS Reading Scale Score Gains
with Instructional Time

Reading Pretest Scale Score Ranges	Hours of Instruction					
<180 ESL Beginning Literacy	12 to 74 Hours		75 to 120 Hours		121 or more Hours	
Program Years	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
1999-2000	19.2	1067	19.9	882	22.9	1036
2000-01	20.3	2229	22.4	1526	26.1	1811
2001-02	20.2	2298	22.3	1290	25.9	1584
2002-03	19.7	2939	22.5	1410	27.8	1852

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❖ On average, how long is it taking your learners to complete and/or advance to a higher functioning level?

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Intensity and Duration

The data tell us we need:

- intensity (hours/month) and
- duration (months/year)

for many adults learners to succeed.

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DUH-HUH!!!

BFO

So how do we get it?

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What does the research tell us?

❖ Latest Research - Learner Persistence Study
- John Comings et al., NCSALL, 2004
  - John_comings@harvard.edu
  - http://www.ncsall.net
- Surveyed 150 adult learners
- Observed 9 programs that were trying to improve persistence

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Student Pathways

❖ **Long-Term**: highly motivated, few barriers, older, slow progress
❖ **Mandatory**: poor motivation
❖ **Short-term**: project learners
❖ **Try-out**: fairly large, too many barriers, drop out
❖ **Intermittent**: largest group, motivated, participate, barrier emerges, stop-out, return later

Comings, 2004

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Activity 1: Indicators of Persistence

❖ Which of these do you think characterize the "persistors" in the NCSALL study?
- Gender
- Immigrant status
- Age of children
- Employment status
- Working hours
- Goal
- Negative school experience
- Parent's education
- Involvement in previous training
- Single parent status

Adult Student Characteristics That Support Persistence

❖ Immigrant status, age over 30, and parent of teen or adult children

❖ Involvement in previous efforts at basic skills education, self study, or vocational skill training

❖ Specific goal
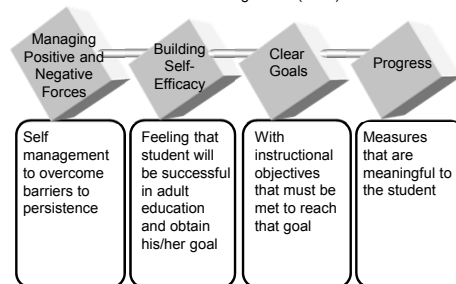
Adult Student Characteristics That Did Not Influence Persistence

❖ Gender and ethnicity

❖ Single parent status

❖ Employment status/working hours

❖ Negative school experience

❖ Parent's education

Persistence Supports

John Comings et al. (2004)

Managing Positive and Negative Forces	Building Self-Efficacy	Clear Goals	Progress
Self management to overcome barriers to persistence	Feeling that student will be successful in adult education and obtain his/her goal	With instructional objectives that must be met to reach that goal	Measures that are meaningful to the student

Program Improvement

❖ When programs improved services,
- Months of engagement did not increase but hours of participation did.

- A major cause was increase in computer use in the first six months of participation.

Learner Persistence Study
Comings et al., 2004

Stop Outs, Not Drop Outs

Alicia Belzer (1998)

❖ Leavers don't consider themselves "drop-outs"
❖ Stop attending but plan on returning later
❖ Departure from a program not viewed as a "negative" or "failure" by students, but rather as a temporary hiatus

Persistence Should Be…

"Adults staying in programs for as long as they can,

engaging in supported self study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and

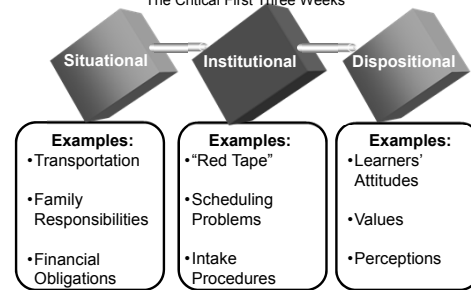returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow."

John Comings, 2004

Three Barriers to Persistence

B. Allan Quigley (1993)
The Critical First Three Weeks

Situational   **Institutional**   **Dispositional**

Examples:	**Examples:**	**Examples:**
•Transportation	•"Red Tape"	•Learners' Attitudes
•Family Responsibilities	•Scheduling Problems	•Values
•Financial Obligations	•Intake Procedures	•Perceptions

Classroom Dynamics

Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education
Hal Beder and Patsy Medina

- Classroom instruction focuses on basic skills, not higher-level abilities
- Teachers are not student-centered.
- Class composition, enrollment turbulence, and funding pressure shape classroom dynamics.
- Continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels are serious and understated problems in the adult literacy classroom.

Turbulence and Focus

Thomas Sticht et al. (1998)

❖ Open-entry/continuous enrollment makes it harder for students to stay in the program.
❖ Multi-focused/multi-level classes make student persistence more difficult.
❖ Persistence rates increase in classes where the focus of students and classrooms are more closely aligned (e.g., job readiness, GED).

Activity 2   Does It Jive?

❖ Four research briefs
- Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes (Comings, et al)
- The First Three Weeks: A Critical Time for Motivation (Quigley)
- Stopping Out, Not Dropping Out (Belzer)
- Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education (Beder and Medina)

Activity 2   Does it jive?

Read the research brief for your designated study. With your table partners, discuss the following questions:
- Do the research findings jive with your experiences?
- If yes, what in particular?
- If no, what seems out of place?
- Was there anything missing that you think impacts learner persistence?

Activity 3: Creating a Vision

❖ Reflect on what you learned from the research and complete the following sentence:

Learner persistence will be working well in my program when…

Research Implications

❖ From an accountability perspective
  ○ Participation ends when an adult drops out of a program

❖ From a student's perspective
  ○ Participation may continue after leaving the program through self study or distance learning

Research Implications

❖ New definition values self-study, transfer, re-entry into a program

❖ Increased need for programs to stay connected and offer alternative services

Research Implications

❖ Learner persistence impacts everything we do.

The Three P's
Practice
(instructional delivery and program structure)

Policy and Procedures

Professional Development

Activity 4: What are you doing now?

Complete the Activity 4 Chart by responding to these questions:
- What practices are you doing right now to promote learner persistence?
- What policies or procedures do you have that support learner persistence?
- What professional development do you have access to that provides tools and strategies for increasing student retention?
- Does what you are doing NOW reflect the vision you created in Activity 2?
- You will continue to add to the chart throughout the workshop.

Break Time!

Part II

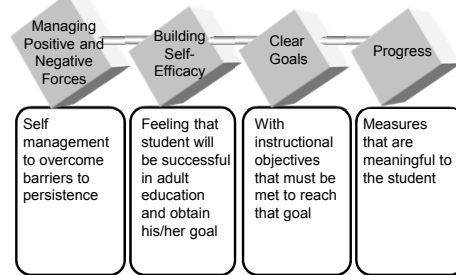❖ We will take a look at the following questions:

- What strategies can local programs use to support learner persistence?
- What professional development resources are available related to learner persistence?
- Where should I begin?

Persistence Supports

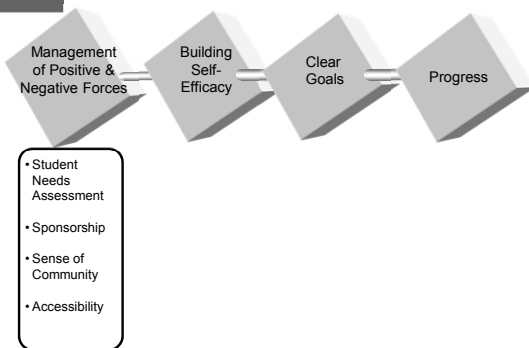John Comings et al. (2004)

Managing Positive and Negative Forces	Building Self-Efficacy	Clear Goals	Progress
Self management to overcome barriers to persistence	Feeling that student will be successful in adult education and obtain his/her goal	With instructional objectives that must be met to reach that goal	Measures that are meaningful to the student

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Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence

Management of Positive & Negative Forces   Building Self-Efficacy   Clear Goals   Progress

- Student Needs Assessment
- Sponsorship
- Sense of Community
- Accessibility

Management of Positive and Negative Forces

❖ Strategy 1: Student Needs Assessment
- Involving students in examining their supporting and hindering forces to achieving their goals

❖ Sample needs assessment processes
- Brainstorming and prioritizing
- Acting it out
- Classroom discussion
- Snowball consensus
- Affinity diagramming
- Learner-to-learner interviews

Management of Positive and Negative Forces

❖ Strategy 2: Sponsorships
- Personal
  - Relatives, godmothers, children, spouses and partners neighbors, friends, co-workers
- Official
  - Paid professionals: Social workers, parole officers, DHS case workers, librarians, teachers
- Intermediate
  - Pastors, fellow recovery program members and sponsors, volunteer tutors, other students

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Management of Positive and Negative Forces

❖ Sponsorship Strategies
- Identify sponsors during intake process.
- Discuss with student the role the sponsor can play in supporting him/her.
- Help students identify sponsors if they don't have any.
- Ask student's permission to contact sponsor if persistence challenges occur.
- Employ a Student Persistence Coordinator (paid or volunteer) to support students.
- Form a Student Retention Team to contact and support at-risk students.

Management of Positive and Negative Forces

❖ Strategy 3: Building a Sense of Community
  ○ Managed intake and managed enrollment classes (students begin and progress together)
  ○ Field trips, potluck dinners, etc. that bring learners together in different ways
  ○ Student-run activities (e.g., Second Chance Prom)
  ○ Class ground rules set by students
  ○ Diversity training
  ○ Buddy system for new and returning students
  ○ Group activities (e.g., *Dear Abby)*
  ○ Group projects

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Management of Positive and Negative Forces

❖ Strategy 4: Accessibility
  ○ Intake Process: Barrier resolution to find out what potential hindering forces may be and providing assistance (directly or through referrals)
  ○ Persistence Plan: developing a plan during intake for continued work during potential "stopping out" period
  ○ Support Services: networking with community agencies, prioritizing services to include a counseling position
  ○ Enrollment and Attendance Policies: changing policies to reduce classroom chaos from constant entering and exiting of students
  ○ Flexible Scheduling

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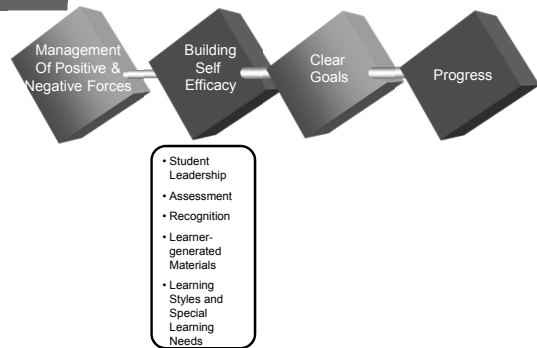## Activity #5: Managing the Forces

With your table partners:
  ○ Review the handout on Sample Activities for Management of Positive and Negative Forces.

  ○ Have you implemented any of these activities? If so, how did you do it and what were the results?

  ○ Is there anything you need to add to the Activity 4 chart?

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Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence

Management Of Positive & Negative Forces → Building Self Efficacy → Clear Goals → Progress

• Student Leadership
• Assessment
• Recognition
• Learner-generated Materials
• Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs

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Building Self-Efficacy

❖ A belief by learners that they can be successful when attempting new activities as learners.

❖ What are you doing now?

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Activity #6: The Flipchart Brainstorm

❖ Five strategies are listed on flipcharts around the room:
  ○ Student leadership
  ○ Assessment
  ○ Recognition
  ○ Learner-generated materials
  ○ Learning styles and special learning needs
❖ Are you doing anything in your program related to any of these strategies? If so, jot them down on the flipcharts.
❖ Is there anything you need to add to the Activity 4 chart?

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Building Self Efficacy

❖ Strategy 1: Student Leadership
- Peer orientations
- Peer teaching
- Advisory board members
- Student Advisory Board
- Student Retention Team
- Student-led projects

Building Self Efficacy

❖ Assessment
- Begin with informal non-academic measures before using formal (TABE, CASAS) measures
- Begin standardized testing with the student's greatest comfort area
- Involve learners more in assessment process
  - Portfolio assessment
  - Conferencing
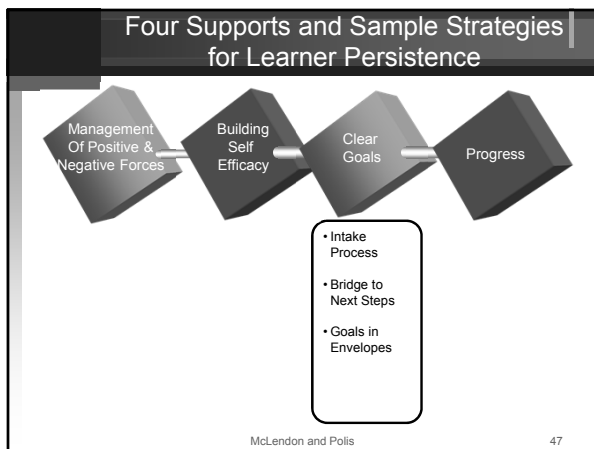   - Student Teacher Evaluation Process (STEPS)

Building Self Efficacy

❖ Strategy 3: Recognition and Incentives
  - National Adult Student Honor Society
    http://www.naehs.org/Default.htm
  - Student of the Month
  - Family of the Month
  - Graduation Ceremonies
  - Perfect Attendance Recognition
  - Incentive Store
  - Other

Building Self Efficacy

❖ Strategy 4: Learner-Generated Materials
- Student newsletter
- Student writings publication
- Class anthology

❖ Strategy 5: Addressing Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs
- Learning style inventories
- Special learning needs screening instruments
- Special equipment
- Quiet work space
- Work load
- Repetition and variety

Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence

Management Of Positive & Negative Forces → Building Self Efficacy → Clear Goals → Progress

- Intake Process
- Bridge to Next Steps
- Goals in Envelopes

Clear Goals

❖ Adults are motivated to enroll by the desire to reach a specific goal.
❖ Therefore, you must
- Identify their specific goals
- Show the student how the class/program will help them reach their goals
- Understand the difference between student and NRS goals
❖ Important to:
- Help them determine realistic goals (short-term and long-term)
- Set interim success benchmarks
- Regularly review progress to those goals

Clear Goals

❖ Strategy 1: Intake Process
- Do not focus on academic goal setting only.
  - "What do you want to do that you cannot do now?"
  - If he/she wants a GED, "What will the GED do for you that you cannot do now?"
- LA Unified
  - WHAT do you want to say?
  - TO WHOM do you want to say it?
  - WHERE do you want to say it?

Clear Goals

- Begin with a preliminary goal setting activity during the intake process to identify interests and strengths (websites listed in Resource Packet).
- Complete academic assessments before finalizing goals, as well as learning style inventories and special learning needs screening, if appropriate.

Clear Goals

❖ Strategy 1: Intake Process
- Schedule a goal conference with individual student to discuss short-term and long-term goal attainment, realistic timelines, and interim success benchmarks that will need to occur in pursuit of the goal/s
- Discuss the reality of "episodic participation" and that there is support available when you find it necessary to stop coming to class for a while.
- For NRS goals, refer to the handout Considerations for Setting Realistic NRS Goals.

Clear Goals

❖ Strategy 2: Bridge to Next Steps
- Students may not know all of their options for further training and employment. "They don't know what they don't know."
- Realistic goal setting may be hindered or short-sighted.
- Provide opportunities for students to become familiar with options for further education or work.
  - Field trips to community college
  - Job shadowing opportunities with local employers
  - Guest speakers from your One Stops

Clear Goals

❖ Strategy 3: Goals in Envelope
- Goals can change over time.
- Once the initial goals are determined, have the student write them down.
- Place the goal sheet in an envelope.
- Explain to the student that you will mail the envelope to the student in six weeks as a reminder and to determine if the goals need to be changed/adjusted.
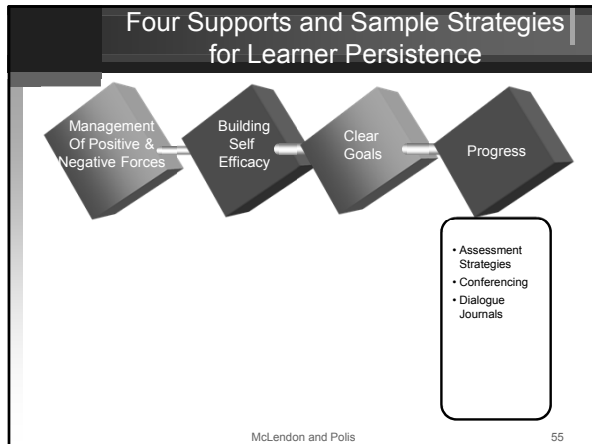
Activity 7: What Can I Change?

❖ Select one of the three sample strategies for helping students set clear goals.
❖ Compare that strategy to what you are doing now.
❖ What changes could you make to your current practice to incorporate the sample strategy?
❖ Share your ideas with your table partners.

Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence

Management Of Positive & Negative Forces

Building Self Efficacy

Clear Goals

Progress

• Assessment Strategies
• Conferencing
• Dialogue Journals

Progress

Assessment Strategies

- Use a variety of methods to allow students to see their progress (e.g., portfolios, checklists, technology-based tracking mechanisms)

- Train students in self-evaluation procedures

Progress

❖ Conferencing
- STEPS – regularly scheduled sessions to review student progress and evaluate materials, methods, etc. (website in Resource Packet)

❖ Dialogue Journals
- Using a process for learners to share their concerns in a private way and for teachers to respond to those concerns

Discussion Point

❖ What are you doing now to make sure that students are experiencing progress **_and_** seeing the results?

Episodic Learning and Re-engagement

❖ Set the Expectation
- At intake,
  - Acknowledge the need for **regular attendance** BUT acknowledge the possible reality of **episodes of participation**
  - Review available **non-instructional support and distance learning opportunities to keep them engaged**
  - Review **re-entry procedures**
  - Review **transitions** to other programs and post secondary
- During class or small group instruction
  - **Acknowledge re-entering students**
  - In group discussions, include **re-entry and transitions**

Chart Check

❖ Anything you need to add to the chart for:
- Clear goals?
- Progress?
- Episodic learning?

If we really want a change in practice…

- ❖ Two factors that positively affect teacher change (Smith, 2002) are:
  - Involving teachers in the decision making process
  - Teachers working together to solve problems—collegiality

- ❖ Involve teachers/tutors in the process of analyzing student persistence data and recommending program improvement strategies

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Professional Development Options

- o Organize study circles on student persistence
  - Resource: NCSALL's Study Circle Guide on Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education
    http://www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=25
  - Follow-up the study circle with pilot tests of various persistence strategies

- o Select a few research studies for teachers/tutors to review and discuss at the next staff meeting or training workshop
  - Variety of research included in your notebook

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Professional Development Options

- o Develop a learner persistence bulletin board and/or list serv for teachers/tutors to exchange their ideas on research findings and learner persistence.
- o Encourage practitioner research projects related to student persistence
- o Encourage teachers and tutors to enroll in a free student retention online course at http://adulted.successfast.net/

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Revisiting the Vision

- ❖ Look back at the vision you created for learner persistence at the beginning of the session.

- ❖ Would you change anything in it now?

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Activity 8: Making a Learner Persistence Plan

- ❖ Review the chart you developed from Activity 4.
- ❖ Select one category (Practice, Policy and Procedures, or Professional Development) which you would like to address first.
- ❖ Complete the Activity 8 Chart to outline your Learner Persistence Learning Project.

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Final Reflection

- ❖ Think about one thing that you learned today that had the greatest impact.

- ❖ What effect will that have on how you approach learner persistence?

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Thank You

With what we get, we make a living
With what we give, we make a life
Arthur Ashe

❖Lennox McLendon
  o llmcl422@netscape.net