

Student Persistence

Here Today – Gone Tomorrow

**By:
Kathy Pollis
and
Dr. Lennox McLendon**

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Here Today—Gone Tomorrow:

**Why do our students leave?
How can we help them stay?**

A Workshop Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This workshop guide was developed to assist adult education trainers in introducing the latest research on learner persistence, conducted by the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), and its implications for practice. The workshops are designed to actively engage the participant in learning, to provide opportunities for reflection and application of the skills learned, and to elicit the sharing of ideas and experiences with colleagues.

For ease of use and reproduction, this guide is packaged in five separate components.

- Component 1 includes objectives, agendas, intended audiences, and a list of necessary training materials and handouts for conducting a one and one-half-hour, a three-hour, and a six-hour workshop.
- Component 2 includes reproducible activities for each of the workshops, designated as 2.1 for the 1 ½ hour workshop, 2.3 for the 3 hour workshop, and 2.6 for the 6 hour workshop.
- Component 3 includes the *Student Persistence Resource Packet*, a bibliography of articles, research, strategies, and tips related to student retention.
- Component 4 includes research briefs of particular importance to student persistence.
- Components 5.1, 5.3, and 5.6 are the powerpoint presentations for the 1 ½, 3, and 6 hour workshops. Each powerpoint includes presenter's notes and script.

Overview of the training workshops:

- The 1 1/2 hour workshop introduces participants to the latest research on adult learner persistence and provides a brief overview of sample activities that teachers and local administrators can implement in their programs. Participants examine what they are currently doing to promote learner persistence and receive a Resource Packet with a variety of articles, activities, and tips to expand their current efforts.
- The 3 hour workshop begins with an overview of the research and then explores instructional and programmatic strategies that practitioners can use to increase learner persistence related to the four “supports” identified by NCSALL. Through a series of small group activities, participants examine what they are presently doing to promote learner persistence and use that to guide their selection of appropriate new strategies to try in the future. The workshop also takes a look at additional professional development options that are available to increase practitioners’ knowledge of learner persistence. The workshop concludes with the selection of a learning project to pilot a new concept or strategy gained through the training.
- The 6 hour workshop includes similar information and activities as the 3 hour training but gives participants an opportunity to examine the research more closely. Research briefs from five different studies are explored in small groups to determine the implications of the research on practice, professional development, and local policies and procedures.

RATIONALE OR NEED FOR THE TRAINING

"Isn't there anything I can do to keep my students motivated?" This is the question I asked back in 1972, when I lost two students from my first adult basic education (ABE) class. At the time, my reaction was: "I must do better." I tried harder. I searched for more and better materials. I employed the best techniques I could find. I was as supportive as any teacher could be. But, somehow, even with my best efforts, things didn't change much. Some students stayed. Some didn't. I just couldn't get a handle on it. My best wasn't enough." (B. Allen Quigley, 2004)

Does this sound familiar? Ask most adult educators, and they'll tell you that lack of student persistence or retention is the #1 problem in Adult Basic Education. Attrition rates as high as 60-70% are reported in state and federal statistics (Quigley 1995). The raw numbers may be alarming, but they do not tell the whole story. Several studies show that non-completers sometimes leave when they feel their goals were realized (Kambouri and Francis 1994; Perin and Greenberg 1994). The phenomenon of stopping out--one or more cycles of attending, withdrawing, and returning--is typical of adults who must place the student role on the back burner temporarily. (Kirka, 1995)

So whether our learners are "stopping out" or "dropping out," we know that helping them stay in our programs until they reach their initial goals is often very difficult. We also know that increased accountability standards that place a higher emphasis on student achievement and outcomes makes learner persistence even more critical.

Most importantly, however, we need to figure out what it takes in order to better serve the men and women who come to us seeking our help. Most of them come to us with specific goals in mind, with things they want to accomplish in life. But somewhere along the line, something gets in the way. It is our responsibility, as adult educators, to take a closer look at what we're doing – and perhaps what we're not doing.

Thanks to the recent research from NCSALL, we now have a better idea of why they leave us and what we can do to help them stay -- or keep them engaged during the time they must leave. The workshops outlined in this guide will explore that research and other studies as well so that we can begin to build a system of strategies for increasing learner persistence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TRAINER

As a trainer, you should carefully read this guide, including each of the research articles, to ensure that you have sufficient background information to conduct an effective workshop. The more you understand the issues, the research, and the possible solutions, the more confident you will be in presenting the content.

You will probably want to adapt the agenda, powerpoint, or activities to meet the needs of your specific audiences. As you determine your training structure, keep in mind the importance of providing opportunities for the participants to practice applying the information, reflecting on its importance, and gaining feedback and support. For example, you may want to divide the six-hour workshop into two separate three-hour sessions, providing sufficient time in-between for participants to “try-out” some strategies. Or, you may want to schedule a follow up session after the 1 ½ or 3 hour workshops to give participants a chance to share what they have done with the information they learned and to brainstorm solutions for any challenges they encountered.

The powerpoint presentations include presenter’s notes and sample script.

- Presenter notes or suggestions are indicated by a ➡.
- The sample script is typed in *italics*.

One and One-half Hour Workshop Agenda

Objectives

- ❖ Examine the latest research on student persistence to determine factors that promote retention.
- ❖ Determine research implications for the delivery of adult education services.
- ❖ Explore sample instructional and management strategies that address the research findings.

Intended Audience

Adult education teachers, tutors, local administrators, counselors, and others who work directly with adult learners

Time

One and one-half hours

Agenda

10 minutes	Welcome and introductions Training objectives Why is student persistence so important?
20 minutes	What does the research tell us? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCSALL's Learner Persistence Study • Activity 1: Indicators of Persistence • B. Quigley's Critical First Three Weeks • H Beder's Classroom Dynamics • T. Sticht's Turbulence and Focus
10 minutes	Research implications Activity 2: What are you doing now?
40 minutes	Examining sample strategies to support learner persistence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Managing positive and negative forces ✦ Building self efficacy ✦ Setting clear goals ✦ Showing progress
10 minutes	Final reflection Wrap up and evaluation

Workshop Materials

Supplies and Equipment:

- ___ Blank flipcharts and markers
- ___ Name cards
- ___ Computer, LCD projector, and screen
- ___ Evaluation forms

Handouts:

- ___ A. Agenda
- ___ B. Activity Packet (Component 2.1)
- ___ C. *Student Persistence Resource Packet* (Component 3)
- ___ D. Powerpoint slide handouts (3 or 6 to a page) – download powerpoint (Component 5.1)

Three-Hour Workshop Agenda

Objectives

- ❖ Examine the latest research on student persistence to determine factors that promote retention.
- ❖ Determine research implications for the delivery of adult education services.
- ❖ Explore a variety of instructional and management strategies that address the research findings.
- ❖ Examine professional development options that can help instructors support student persistence.
- ❖ Review a planning template for initiating a student persistence learning project.

Intended Audience

Adult education teachers, tutors, local administrators, counselors, and others who work directly with adult learners

Time

Three hours, including one ten-minute break

Caution: This agenda covers a substantial amount of content. The presenter will need to be very conscientious about time allocation and may wish to adapt some components accordingly. Based on the particular audience, the presenter may want to delete some elements to provide additional interaction time on others.

Agenda

10 minutes	Welcome and introductions Training objectives Why is student persistence so important?
20 minutes	What does the research tell us? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCSALL's Learner Persistence Study • Activity 1: Indicators of Persistence • B. Quigley's Critical First Three Weeks • H Beder's Classroom Dynamics • T. Sticht's Turbulence and Focus
15 minutes	Activity 2: Creating a Vision
25 minutes	Research implications The three P's: policy, professional development, and practice Activity 3: What are you doing now?
10 minutes	Break
25 minutes	Persistence supports and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for addressing management of positive and negative forces Activity 4: The Force Be With You
25 minutes	Strategies for building self efficacy Activity 5: The Flipchart Brainstorm
25 minutes	Strategies for setting clear goals Strategies for demonstrating progress
15 minutes	Professional development options Activity 6: Making a Learning Persistence Plan
10 minutes	Next Steps Reflection and evaluation

Three-Hour Workshop Agenda (cont'd)

Workshop Materials

Supplies and Equipment:

- Blank flipcharts and markers
- Name cards
- Tape
- Computer, LCD projector, and screen
- Evaluation forms

Newsprint:

- Five sheets of newsprint with the following titles listed (one per page):
 - (1) Student Leadership, (2) Assessment, (3) Recognition, (4) Learner-generated Materials, (5) Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs

Handouts:

- A. Agenda
- B. Activity Packet (Component 2.3)
- C. *Student Persistence Resource Packet* (Component 3)
- D. Powerpoint slide handouts (3 or 6 to a page) – download powerpoint (Component 5.3)

Six-hour Workshop Agenda

Objectives

- ❖ Examine the latest research on student persistence to determine factors that promote retention.
- ❖ Determine if the research findings are consistent with participant's experience.
- ❖ Identify research implications related to the delivery of adult education services.
- ❖ Explore a variety of instructional and management strategies that address the research findings.
- ❖ Examine professional development options that can help instructors support student persistence.
- ❖ Outline a student persistence learning project to work on during the next three months.

Intended Audience

Adult education teachers, tutors, local administrators, counselors, and others who work directly with adult learners

Time

Three hours, including one ten-minute break

Caution: This agenda covers a substantial amount of content. The presenter will need to be very conscientious about time allocation and may wish to adapt some components accordingly. Based on the particular audience, the presenter may want to delete some elements to provide additional interaction time on others.

Agenda

20 minutes	Welcome and introductions Training objectives Why is student persistence so important?
50 minutes	What does the research tell us? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NCSALL's Learner Persistence Study ○ Activity 1: Indicators of Persistence ○ B. Quigley's Critical First Three Weeks ○ H. Beder's Classroom Dynamics ○ T. Sticht's Turbulence and Focus
45 minutes	Activity 2: Does It Jive?
15 minutes	Break
10 minutes	Activity 3: Creating Your Vision of Learner Persistence
20 minutes	Research implications The Three P's Activity 4: What Are You Doing Now?
30 minutes	Persistence supports and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ #1: Strategies for addressing management of positive and negative forces ❖ Activity 5: Managing the Forces
60 minutes	Lunch
40 minutes	Persistence supports and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ #2: Strategies for building self efficacy ❖ Activity 6: The Flipchart Brainstorm

Six-hour Workshop Agenda (cont'd)

25 minutes	Persistence supports and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ #3: Strategies for setting clear goals ❖ Activity 7: What Can I Change?
25 minutes	Persistence supports and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ #4: Strategies for demonstrating progress ❖ What are you doing now?
15 minutes	Break
15 minutes	Taking a closer look at episodic learning
20 minutes	Professional development options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ How can we get teachers and tutors actively engaged?
20 minutes	Revisiting the Vision Activity 8: Making a Learner Persistence Plan
15 minutes	Final reflection
5 minutes	Evaluation

Workshop Materials

Supplies and Equipment:

- ___ Blank flipcharts and markers
- ___ Name cards
- ___ Tape
- ___ Computer, LCD projector, and screen
- ___ Evaluation forms

Newsprint:

- ___ Five sheets of newsprint with the following titles listed (one per page):
 - (1) Student Leadership, (2) Assessment, (3) Recognition, (4) Learner-generated Materials, (5) Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs

Handouts:

- ___ Agenda
- ___ Activity Packet (Component 2.6)
- ___ *Student Persistence Resource Packet* (Component 3)
- ___ Research Briefs (Component 4)
- ___ PowerPoint slide handouts (3 or 6 to a page) – download PowerPoint (Component 5.6)