

**Here Today – Gone Tomorrow:**  
Why do they leave? How do we help them stay?

*Strategies for Motivating & Retaining Adult Learners*

**Nevada Adult Education OnLine**  
April 6 & May 11, 2010

Facilitated by  
Dr. Lennox McLendon  
Based on NCSALL Research

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

**We All Know The Issues...**

❖ Here today, gone tomorrow!

Why don't our students stick around longer?



McLendon and Polis 2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Part I**

❖ We will take a look at the following questions:

- What are the findings from the latest research on learner persistence?
- Do the findings jive with your experiences?

McLendon and Polis 3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Intensity and Duration

The data tell us we need:

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

for many adults learners to succeed.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What does the research tell us?

### ❖ Latest Research - Learner Persistence Study

- John Comings et al., NCSALL, 2004
  - [John\\_comings@harvard.edu](mailto:John_comings@harvard.edu)
  - <http://www.ncsall.net>
- Surveyed 150 adult learners
- Observed 9 programs that were trying to improve persistence

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Adult Student Characteristics That Did Not Influence Persistence

- ❖ Gender and ethnicity
- ❖ Single parent status
- ❖ Employment status/working hours
- ❖ Negative school experience
- ❖ Parent's education

McLendon and Polis 11

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Persistence Supports

John Comings et al. (2004)

```

    graph LR
      A[Managing Positive and Negative Forces] --> B[Building Self-Efficacy]
      B --> C[Clear Goals]
      C --> D[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
-----------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------

McLendon and Polis 12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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
<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Transportation</li> <li>•Family Responsibilities</li> <li>•Financial Obligations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•“Red Tape”</li> <li>•Scheduling Problems</li> <li>•Intake Procedures</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Learners’ Attitudes</li> <li>•Values</li> <li>•Perceptions</li> </ul>

McLendon and Polis 16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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.

McLendon and Polis 17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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).

McLendon and Polis 18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Discussion – Does it jive?

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?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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**

McLendon and Polis 22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Interim Activity :**  
**What are you doing now?**

Complete the Activity 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?

McLendon and Polis 23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Break Time!**



McLendon and Polis 24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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?

---

---

---

---

---

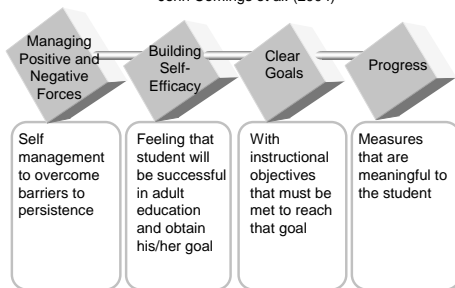
---

---

---

## Persistence Supports

John Comings et al. (2004)



---

---

---

---

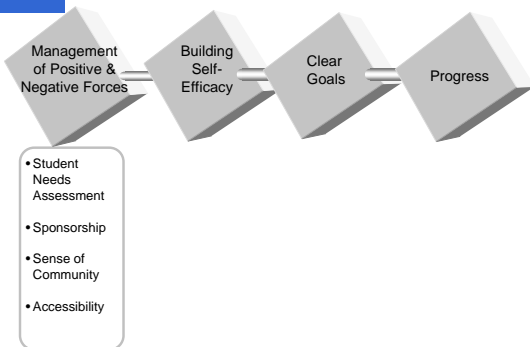
---

---

---

---

## Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 28

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 29

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Activity #2-1: Managing the Forces

**Discussion:**

- What are you doing now that helps students manage those forces (Items from your Interim Activity)?
- Did any of the strategies in the resource packet hold promise for you?

McLendon and Polis 30

---

---

---

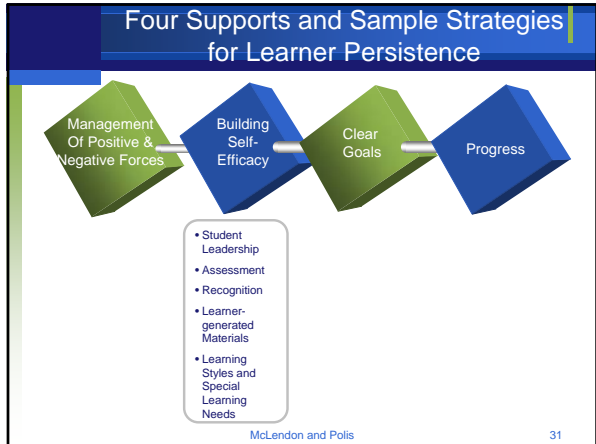
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Building Self-Efficacy

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

McLendon and Polis 32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Building Self-Efficacy

❖ Strategy 1: Student Leadership

- Peer orientations
- Peer teaching
- Advisory board members
- Student Advisory Board
- Student Retention Team
- Student-led projects

McLendon and Polis 33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Building Self-Efficacy**

❖ **Strategy 2: 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)

McLendon and Polis 34

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

McLendon and Polis 35

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

McLendon and Polis 36

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Activity #2-2: Self Efficacy

**Discussion:**

- What are you doing now that helps students build self efficacy (Items from your Interim Activity)?
  
- Did any of the strategies in the resource packet hold promise for you?

McLendon and Polis 37

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence

McLendon and Polis 38

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 39

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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?

McLendon and Polis 40

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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

McLendon and Polis 41

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**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.

McLendon and Polis 42

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Activity #2-3: Clear Goals

### Discussion:

- What are you doing that helps students set clear goals (Items from your Interim Activity)?
- Did any of the strategies in the resource packet hold promise for you?

---

---

---

---

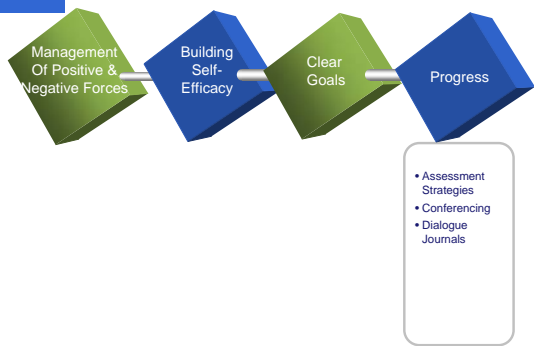
---

---

---

---

## Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 46

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Activity #2-4: Seeing Progress

Discussion:

- What are you doing that helps students see they are making progress (Items from your Interim Activity)?
  
- Did any of the strategies in the resource packet hold promise for you?

McLendon and Polis 47

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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**

McLendon and Polis 48

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Chart Check

- ❖ Anything you need to add to the chart for:
  - Managing
  - Clear goals?
  - Progress?
  - Episodic learning?
  
- ❖ Revisit your Interim Activity Chart



McLendon and Polis 49

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## 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

McLendon and Polis 50

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Professional Development Options

- 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
  
- 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

McLendon and Polis 51

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Professional Development Options

- Develop a learner persistence bulletin board and/or list serv for teachers/tutors to exchange their ideas on research findings and learner persistence.
- Encourage practitioner research projects related to student persistence
- Encourage teachers and tutors to enroll in a free student retention online course (Resource Packet pages 8 & 9)

McLendon and Polis 52

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Activity 8: Making a Learner Persistence Plan

- ❖ Review the chart you developed for your Interim Activity
- ❖ Select one category (Practice, Policy and Procedures, or Professional Development) which you would like to address first.
- ❖ Complete the Learner Persistence Plan Activity (Page 77 in your Resource Packet).

McLendon and Polis 53

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### 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?

McLendon and Polis 54

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Thank You**

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

McLendon and Polis 55

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Always willing to help...

- ❖ This session was developed by Lennox McLendon and Kathi Polis based on the valuable work of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. We miss their contributions to our field.
- ❖ Please feel free to contact us if we can help you further.
  - Lennox McLendon
    - [llmcl422@netscape.net](mailto:llmcl422@netscape.net)
  - Kathi Polis
    - [kathi.polis@gmail.com](mailto:kathi.polis@gmail.com)

McLendon and Polis 56

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---