**Persistence in Adult Education Review**

**Basic Concepts**

* **Learner Persistence** “Adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed 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.” (National Center for Study of Adult Learning and Literacy)
* **Critical First Three Weeks** Nationwide, adult education programs lose 50% of their learners, many within the first 3 weeks. Student intake, orientation, and learner goal setting during the first few weeks of class are critical to improving learner retention in adult ed. (Quigley and Uhland. 2000)
* **Learner Goal Setting** Learners who have specific goals in mind are more likely to persist in their studies. (Comings, Perella, and Soricone, 1999.)
* **Supports and Barriers** If students are aware of the forces that help and hinder their persistence, they can take action to manage them and thereby increase the chance of attaining their educational goals. (Comings et al. 1999)
* **"Stop outs" vs. "Drop outs"** Departure from a program is often not a failure, but a temporary situation in which students intend to return when they are able. (Belzer. 1998)

The following documents offer an overview of adult learner persistence and what is understood from **Current Research**. They vary in length, depth, and perspective, but together provide a rich picture of the issue.

**Perspectives on Persistence: A Review of the Research** (2020) Amy Pickard, Alisa Belzer <https://www.proliteracy.org/Portals/0/pdf/Research/Briefs/ProLiteracy-Research-Brief-05_Persistence-2020-11.pdf>

The research reviewed suggests that there are two ways, broadly, that the field has viewed student persistence: a control/prevent perspective and an acknowledge/accommodate perspective. This article looks at the definition, discusses stopping dropout before it happens or supporting attrition that happens. It provides implications for practice by sharing strategies that address persistence.

[**Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach Their Goals**](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/comings-02.pdf) (2007) John Comings <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/comings-02.pdf>

For an in-depth overview of adult learner persistence, this article provides a literature review, a full discussion of the NCSALL Learner Persistence study, Perspectives on Persistence: A Review of the Research and commentary on the implications for policy, research, and practice.

**Persistence**

<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22508/1/doc_4023.pdf>

This paper summarizes recent research on persistence in adult learning. The paper draws in particular on three NRDC research and development initiatives.

**Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research** (2012) Alan M. Lesgold and Melissa Welch-Ross

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13242>

This report recommends a program of research and innovation to gain better understanding of adult literacy learners, improve instruction, and create supports adults need for learning and achievement. See the chapter on *Motivation, Engagement, and Persistence* <http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13242&page=130>.

Drawing on the research, a booklet *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Supporting Learning and Motivation*, explains principles that instructors can follow to support literacy learning and students’ motivation to persist in their studies as well as promising technologies for instruction. Copies of the booklet are available from the National Academies Press <http://www.nap.edu>.

[**California Adult Education Learner Persistence Project Report**](http://www.calpro-online.org/documents/PersistencePub10012007.pdf) (2005) Sandra Kerka

<http://www.calpro-online.org/documents/PersistencePub10012007.pdf>

Describes outcomes of the California Adult Learner Persistence Initiative including online interactive resources and field-based research initiatives and results of site-based study circles on learner persistence. The research digest synthesizes key persistence-related research, including less familiar studies, and focuses on the implications for practice and can be found at <http://www.calpro-online.org/pubs/100719LearnerPersistenceNewsletterPress.pdf>.

[**Poverty, Residential Mobility, and Persistence across Urban and Rural Family Literacy Programs in Pennsylvania**](http://www.ed.psu.edu/educ/goodling-institute/research/Research_Brief_FinalC-1.pdf) (2008) Kai Schafft, Esther Prins, and Marcela Movit

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535320.pdf>

Putting the issue of adult learner persistence in the broader context of poverty, these researchers discuss the social factors that affect student persistence patterns and suggest that improving persistence requires advocating for social policies that address the needs of poor and working class families.

**Factors Influencing the Persistence of GED Students** (2016) David Foster Wilson

<https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5151&context=hse_all>

The goals of this study are to provide some new insights and/or contribute to the current body of knowledge on why GED students are successful or unsuccessful in their academic program. An additional purpose of the study will simply be finding ways to meet the needs of our students. It also

describes some of the circumstances and challenges of adult education that might be different from more traditional settings and students

**National Projects**

**Adult Learner Persistence** <http://www.nelrc.org/persist/overview.html>

Resources from the New England Literacy Resource Center’s action research on learner persistence. On this website, findings are shared and the growing set of research, models, and tools that are emerging not only from the New England work, but from programs and states across the country.

**National Center for Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) Persistence** <http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=80.html>

The research dissemination efforts of NCSALL ended on March 31, 2007 with the end of the federal funding. The research publications, *Focus on Basics,* training and teaching resources, and other materials continue to be available for download from this Web site.

**Persistence Among Adult Education Students Panel** (streaming video) <http://lincs.ed.gov/webcasts/persistence/persistence_cast.html>

This panel discussion focuses on persistence in ABE, ESOL, and GED programs, and features a NCSALL study entitled, *Supporting the Persistence of Adult Basic Education Students.* This report examines student persistence in adult education programs. It presents a working definition of persistence, examines existing research, and describes NCSALL's 3-phase study of factors that support and inhibit persistence.

**Supports and Barriers to Persistence** <http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=1045.html>

A self-study guide that explores the positive and negative forces that help or hinder persistence. Determine strategies to address the situational, institutional and dispositional barriers that face students.

**Seminar Guides** (2005) introduce practitioners to the research on adult student persistence and its implications for practice. Can be used in statewide training or a local program staff meeting.

* **Goals and Self-efficacy in Persistence** <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/self-efficacy_role.pdf>
* [**Helping Adults Persist**](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/persistence_role.pdf) <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/persistence_role.pdf>
* [**Supports and Barriers to Persistence**](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/supports_role.pdf)<http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/supports_role.pdf>

**Study Circle Guide** (2006) addresses issues of student persistence, motivation, and retention in adult basic education (ABE).

* [**Adult Student Persistence**](http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=769.html#persist)<http://www.ncsall.net/index.html@id=896.html>

**National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium - Learner Persistence**  [http://naepdc.org/resource\_library/curriculum/curriculum\_home.html](http://www.naepdc.org/resource_library/curriculum/curriculum_home.html)

[Description: Outside Link](http://www.ric.edu/assets/pages/link_out.php?target=http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/webcasts/persistence/persistence_cast.html)

**Additional Documents** (ordered by year)

**The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning: Challenging Assumptions**(2012)Stephen Reder, The Centre of Literacy

<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/sites/default/files/CFLRsrchBrief_Chllngng_Assmptns.pdf>

Research is needed that looks at life-wide and lifelong trajectories of adult learning and literacy development. The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) is one such study.

**Managed Enrollment: An opportunity to reinvigorate the ABE experience** (2006) Alisa Povenmire, Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education  
<http://mcae.net/documents/ManagedEnrollment.pdf>

This preliminary survey of enrollment practices in adult education programs offers an opportunity to focus the lenses of persistence and accountability on factors that we can actually control within the Adult Education program.

**Student Persistence in Adult ESOL Classroom** (2006) Melinda Roberts, Pearson Education <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/download/adulted/persistence.pdf>

This article offers some strategies that programs can implement to address the persistence of their ESOL students.

## “I Did It for Myself” Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs (2001) John P. Comings, Sondra Cuban, Johannes Bos, Catherine Taylor, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC)

This report describes the design of the LILAA persistence study, the strategies libraries are using to increase student persistence, and emerging implementation issues.

**The Influence of Persistence on Literacy Learning in Adult Education** (1997) Nicholas B. Fitzgerald, Malcolm B. Young, Adult Education Quarterly

Must search ERIC to find a copy.

**Rethinking Literacy Education – Understanding Attrition and Improving Retention** (1997) B. Allan Quigley. Chapter Six: Understanding Attrition and Improving Retention

[**Research to Practice: Increasing Retention Through Student Success**](http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-11.htm) (1995) Kari Malitz and Sarah Nixon-Ponder <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-11.htm>

**Student Retention: Creating Student Success** (1994) NAEPDC

This monograph provides a framework for establishing student retention goals and strategies. The framework clusters around three components: effective support, quality instruction, and suitable program structures and policies.

**Research to Practice: Understanding and Overcoming Resistance to Adult Literacy Education** (1992) B. Allan Quigley <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0600-3.htm>

This study generated specific recommendations for more effective counseling and teaching intervention strategies.