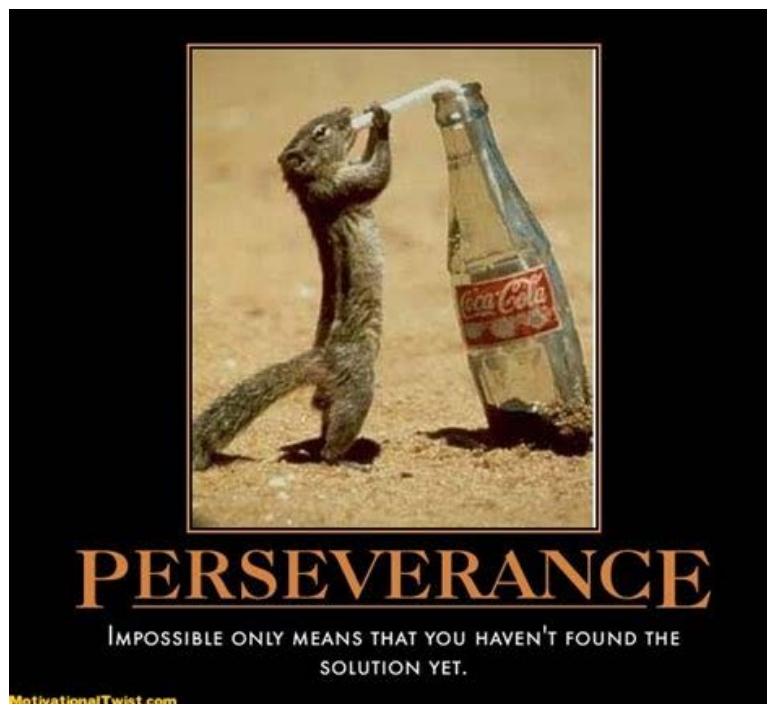


Persistence: Keeping Our Students in Class!

Steve Schmidt
Adult Basic Skills Professional Development
Appalachian State University

abspd.appstate.edu
schmidtsj@appstate.edu
828.262.2262



Remember the Patch Adams Principle

“You treat a disease, you win, you lose. You treat a person, I guarantee you, you’ll win, no matter what the outcome.”

- Patch Adams

Let’s adapt this to our students:

If you treat learners as a problem to be fixed, you’ll both lose. If you treat learners as unique human beings with gifts to share with the world, you’ll both win no matter what the outcome.

Top 5 Perseverance Strategies (With 2 Bonus Ones Too)!

1. Tenacious Follow Up

Tammy was successful in achieving her goal because the team at our adult education center kept encouraging her to come back and repeatedly let her know that we were concerned about her.

As the old saying goes, “Students don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care!”

Many students will “stop out” instead of drop out. Have other work available for them to do (online or homework packets) while they are gone.

Things to Consider:

- Who at your program is responsible for following up with missing students?
- At intake, ask your students for accurate contact information and keep it updated
- How could fellow students keep tabs on their classmates?

Why is Perseverance So Important?

Remember the 100 hour rule!

“[Researchers] identified approximately **100 hours of instruction** as the minimum needed by adults to achieve an increase of one grade-level equivalent on a standardized test of reading comprehension” (Comings, 2007).

Some questions to consider:

- Are your learners staying in your classes/program long enough to make progress?
- If so, what keeps your learners in class?
- If not, why are your learners’ leaving?

2. Obtain, Value and Act on Student Feedback

Conduct Student Focus Groups

“None of us is as smart as all of us.” - Ken Blanchard

“We need an insider in the culture.” - Dr. Gerald Parker

An effective method for finding out what students really think about our programs is to conduct focus groups. Bring a diverse group of students together, ask meaningful questions in a safe environment and take the results seriously by acting on what you learn. Our students will tell us what they really think! (Be sure to serve food too!)

For how to run a focus group, Google: Tip Sheet – A Step-by-Step Approach to Conducting a Focus Group

In the classroom, regularly ask students for feedback about what and how they are learning. Let students know you are using their suggestions. Remember, “No one argues with what they help create!”

Getting feedback could be as simple as putting two questions on a piece of paper:

1. What am I doing that helps you learn?
2. What can I do to help you learn more?

3. Set Clear Expectations about Attendance

“High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation.”

- Charles Kettering

Sometimes what we say and what students hear are very different things!

We **say**: “Our class schedule is flexible; you can come when you want!”

Students **hear**: “I don’t have to come!”

Our students do not do optional well!

In the WIOA era, we are not just preparing students to achieve a high school equivalency but are preparing them for the world of work/better jobs. We need to communicate that students should treat their education with the same mindset they would have on a job. Let students know we expect them to attend regularly and let us know when they will be absent.

Some questions to consider:

- What messages are you sending to your students at program intake about their attendance?
- Is the attendance policy you are using working?
- How are you using managed enrollment/managed intake?

4. Improve Intake and Orientation

A program's intake and orientation process is its front door. Is it full of blue cards (welcoming things) or orange cards (turn offs)? A great orientation should:

Welcome Students and Build Community

Meet staff and tour the facilities

Do icebreaker activities so students get to know each other

Make sure students understand the purpose of any assessments

Offer Clear Information

Create student handbooks

Explain all the educational options available

Explain how to access community support

Do a model lesson to show what learning is like

Involve Students in Orientation

Use student ambassadors. These are friendly, experienced students who are knowledgeable about the program and can serve as guides for other students

Have successful former students speak about their journey to success

Build Student Cohorts

Connect a peer group of learners who will do their studies together

After Orientation Follow Up

Schedule individual meetings with learners to process orientation information, make appropriate decisions, manage outside positive and negative forces and set realistic goals

First Impressions are Huge!

Research shows that the first three weeks are critical in forming bonds between students and learning programs (Quigley, 1987).

Question to Consider:

- How up to date is the information on your website/other program materials?
- Is your orientation process more about giving the assessment or is it more about creating and building community?
- How can we make our orientation more student friendly?

5. Create Classroom Community

“When students come to us, many are scared and unsure. Some have had horrible experiences in school. I want them to feel safe and know that I care about them. I tell them: ‘It’s going to be hard, but we are going to do it together.’ I may not have the most knowledge about every subject, but I deeply care about my students and their successes and would do anything to help them succeed.”

- Kitty Head, 2015 COABE Teacher of the Year

Other Ideas from COABE Teacher of the Year Kitty Head!

Celebrate . . .

Celebrate life victories in the classroom such as birthdays, HSE tests passed, making parole, special days in a student’s culture, and “everyday victories” discovered during class discussions

- “Strides outside the classroom lead to triumphs inside the classroom.”

Celebrate students’ cultures by developing social studies lessons plans around students’ home countries.

Celebrate students’ lives by teaching about things students’ face in their lives.

- “When students feel part of the lesson, they take ownership of it.”

Celebrate students’ work by bringing the workplace to the classroom by using examples from students’ jobs.

One More Idea

Buy coffee cups at the dollar store for students to use during break time. Have students put their names on their cups with a Sharpie marker.

- Do learners feel it matters when they are not in class?
- How can we involve students more in what they are learning?
- Is my classroom a community or is it all about me?

Two Bonus Strategies at No Extra Charge!

6. Dealing with Emotions

The emotions students bring to class are real and can make a huge difference in whether students learn successfully or not. Deal with your own emotions and help your students cope with theirs.

“An important strand of my teaching philosophy is to deal with emotions, my own and the students’, so they don’t get in the way of the learning . . . it will probably take less than a minute to acknowledge the emotions that come up in the moment; that if you leave it for an hour, it might take two minutes to deal with them; if you leave it until the next day it might take half an hour, and if you leave it for longer, who knows how long it will take?”

“How does expressing our feelings help? It helps us keep control of our emotions, helps us identify problems, and helps us maintain clarity in our relationships with other people.

“Saying ‘I’m frustrated’ or ‘I’m mad’ or ‘I’m happy,’ releases the hold the emotion has on you a little, so that you can concentrate on other things, and think and act rather than just emote. Maintaining control over emotions is helpful in the classroom where so many people are working in a public space . . . I’d much rather someone say, ‘I’m really frustrated when I keep getting these questions wrong,’ instead of slamming his books down and stamping out, swearing under his breath, or out loud. Furthermore, a student who can say what is bothering him may be able to go on working, or ask for help, or use some strategy he has for dealing with stress or anger.” (Nonesuch, 2006)

Questions to Consider:

- How do we give our students safe space to deal with their emotions in class?
- How could we do workshops for our students on:

Maintaining a positive relationship with your instructor

Stress management/test anxiety

Being a successful student

7. Inspirational Videos

Share inspirational videos with your students:

- How to Make Stress Your Friend
- Honda the Power of Dreams Failure: The Secret to Success
- Boy Puts Himself in Someone Else's Shoes
- Richie Parker Drive
- Inspiring Man Born without Arms or Legs Nick Vujcic 60 Minutes Australia
- Never Give Up - Advice From The Most Successful People On The Planet
- How You Can Be Good at Math, and Other Surprising Facts about Learning Jo Boaler

Where Persistence Strategies Get Their Power

“Persistence strategies derive their power from the fact that they meet these affective needs of adults” (Nash & Kallenbach, 2009).

Clarity of Purpose

Adults tend to be goal-oriented wanting to use their learning to achieve a desired result.

Agency

Human agency is the capacity for human beings to make things happen through their actions. Adults want to be treated as responsible people who can make their own decisions.

Competence

Competence is the ability to do something successfully. Our adult learners want to be successful in things like reading to their children, living life in an English-speaking world, or getting a job/better job.

Relevance

Adults need learning that applies to their lives. We need to connect what we teach to our learners' goals, interests and life experiences. Relevance can be achieved through contextualized instruction.

Stability

A consistent, stable learning environment where adults feel comfortable and know what to expect is crucial to their learning success.

Sense of Belonging and Community

Adults need to feel welcomed and respected. They also need to develop a sense of belonging.

Research Base

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