

New Evidence about Persistence

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This summary reports on findings and conclusions from two recent studies on persistence and motivation in adult literacy programs. This is very relevant to ABE reading teachers because all experts agree that reading skill development requires thousands of hours of instruction and practice. Therefore, it takes persistence (defined as attendance over time) and motivation for adult readers to regularly attend reading classes and make educational level gains.

One study sought to understand the **differences between persisters and nonpersisters invited to attend a special reading class**. Over 1000 adults reading within 2nd-6th grade level were recruited from 23 adult literacy programs. Only 395 fully completed a battery of oral and written language tests, a reading pattern/attitude questionnaire, and attended *at least* the first day of reading class. By the end, 131 did not make it to the midpoint, 66 continued to the midpoint, and 198 were classified as full completers (attended 60 of 100 class hours). The researchers found that full completers were older, female, ELLs, had lower rapid naming, fluency, and comprehension scores, and accessed information from magazines, the Internet, television, radio, and family/friends. This study confirmed previous findings: (1) older adults persist longer, (2) persistence is not related to employment status, and (3) ELLs tend to complete programs more than ABE/ASE students. They concluded that understanding and promoting persistence is crucial for increasing the impact of ABE for all students.

A second study investigated two questions: **In what goals, goal-directed thinking and action, attributions, and demographic variables do ABE/ASE students differ according to (1) educational gain status and (2) functioning level?** The subjects included 274 students from 13 Midwestern programs at NRS Levels 1-6. All completed an assessment of goal-directed thinking and action and a background questionnaire. The researchers also accessed program data on attendance and educational level gains. They found few (#1-3) significant differences between students who did or did not make an educational gain in one year, but more (#4-8) according to educational functional levels.

1. Students who achieved educational gains attended more hours of class per quarter.
2. Students who did not make educational gains felt more limited by their reading, writing, math, or computer skills.
3. Hispanic students were less likely to make educational gains.
4. Students at Levels 1-3 had a wider variety of reasons for attending than those at Levels 4-6 (typically, HS diploma/GED).
5. Students at Levels 1-3 attended more hours than those at Levels 4-6, especially if they received help from others.
6. Students at Levels 1-3 were more likely to report feeling "downhearted and blue".
7. Students at Levels 1-3 were more likely to report LD, poor health, or a mother who did not graduate high school.
8. There were more self-identified White students in Levels 5-6, more African American in Levels 1-2, and equal distribution in Levels 3-4.

The researchers concluded that long-term exposure to high quality instruction using a meaningful curriculum is necessary for most students to make educational level gains. Although very complicated, they hypothesized that ABE/ASE programs can also “use students’ personal goals in a way to increase persistence and attendance, subsequently increasing national capacity of reading, writing, and math abilities” (page 13).

References

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