

Six Drivers of Persistence

The New England Literacy Resource Center also conducted research into what factors influence adult learners to “persist” or stay in education programs and keep studying. They came up with six drivers of persistence:

Community and belonging

When we feel welcomed, respected, and offered a sense of belonging, we are more apt to return to that setting or task. For that reason, cultivating a sense of belonging and community from the moment a prospective adult learner comes through the doors or calls is an important persistence strategy.

Clarity of purpose

Clarity of purpose refers to helping students gain clarity about their own purposes for learning – their goals and dreams – and how the instructional approaches of their teachers address those purposes. Knowing this builds trust that the program will meet their needs.

A sense of competence

Adults’ sense of competence and self-efficacy (beliefs about one’s ability to perform in a specific area – cooking, math, languages, etc.) can have a profound effect on their persistence and achievement. Students with more self-efficacy are willing to work harder and persist in the face of adversity to reach their goals.

Stability

Learning is difficult in an environment that is chaotic or unstable. This is challenging, especially, for the many adult learners whose lives are marked by instability caused by poverty and trauma. According to Perry (2006), “The major challenge to the educator working with highly stressed or traumatized adults is to furnish the structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn.”

Relevance

The degree of perceived relevance of instruction to the adult learners’ goals, interests and life experience is a key factor in adults’ motivation to persist in their studies. Most adult learners juggle many competing priorities that may take precedence if the instructional program does not feel meaningful to their needs and interests.

Agency

Agency is the capacity for human beings to make things happen through their actions. As people mature, they move from dependence toward self-direction, and want to be treated as responsible individuals with the capacity to determine things for themselves.