The California Adult Education
LEARNER
PERSISTENCE
PROJECT

CALPRO

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Foreword

This publication, produced by the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO), under funding from the California Department of Education (CDE), presents the outcomes of a multi-year initiative on enhancing adult learner persistence. It addresses three distinct but related efforts on learner persistence: (1) the adult learner persistence Web site developed by the CDE, (2) a field-based research initiative (FBRI) on learner persistence, and (3) site-based study circles on learner persistence. The purpose of each of these efforts was the same: to make available to California adult educators information about current research findings on learner persistence and to invite them to use the findings to design and implement interventions to enhance the persistence of their adult learners. Together, the three efforts make up the Adult Learner Persistence Project, which is part of a larger effort—the California Research-to-Practice Initiative.

Wendi Maxwell of the CDE Adult Education Office describes the initiative and the adult learner persistence Web site, created by the CDE with support from the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN). The purpose of the Web site is to help agencies identify and develop objectives for enhancing learner persistence and develop action plans for implementing the objectives. Section 2 presents abstracts of seven field-based studies on learner persistence conducted during the 2005-2006 academic year by teachers in their classrooms. Finally, Section 3 presents selected results from site-based study circles (brainstorming sessions) on learner persistence, as reported by the programs that conducted them.

We hope that this publication provides insights and guidance to adult educators as they continue to review the research on learner persistence and design interventions to enhance persistence. Additional resources on learner persistence are available on the CALPRO Web site, www.calpro-online.org.

Mary Ann Corley, Ph.D.

CALPRO Director

Introduction

California's Research-to-Practice Initiative

By its nature, adult education concentrates on "what works." Adult learners have little time to waste, and they abandon education programs that do not meet their needs. In an effort to identify and publicize best practices in adult education, the United States Department of Education placed increased emphasis on research-based instruction as part of the 2003 policy statements for proposed reauthorization of the federal Workforce Investment Act.

Mirroring the national recommendations, the California Department of Education (CDE) Adult Education Office launched a Research-to-Practice Initiative in 2003 designed to help adult educators identify effective practice. The initiative included five objectives (see figure 1).

1. **Make research available** to practitioners through online resources and reference libraries throughout the state. Host regional and statewide meetings and symposia on adult education research.

2. **Infuse research into schools** by providing research-based professional development and by sponsoring site-based teacher study circles.

3. **Connect practitioners to researchers** through online discussions and classroom application of research findings.

4. **Connect policy to research.** Assure that state-level program decisions are based on data and research, identify research opportunities at the state and local level, and encourage administrators to make research-based decisions.

5. **Sponsor** research at the practitioner level.

The Research-to-Practice Initiative continues to guide professional development in California and provide a structure for growth at the state and local levels. Practitioners in California now have ready access to research articles, summaries, and digests. Workshops help administrators and teachers learn how to understand and evaluate research. Teachers and administrators have access to professional wisdom and evidence-based practice to inform their classroom and administrative strategies. All new professional development curricula are based on extensive, documented research.

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The California Adult Learner Persistence Project

One component of the Research-to-Practice Initiative is a statewide voluntary focus on adult learner persistence. In spring 2004, the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO) adopted adult learner persistence study circle materials developed by the National Center for the Study of Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). CALPRO trained adult educators to facilitate discussions on learner persistence research using the study circle format. Several local agencies held study circle meetings during the fall of 2004 and the spring of 2005.

That winter, in December 2004, California hosted a national research-to-practice symposium, *A Meeting of the Minds*, co-sponsored by the CDE, CALPRO, and NCSALL. National researchers presented their findings, and teachers discussed the implications for classroom practice. One of the most frequently discussed sessions at the symposium was NCSALL Director John Comings' presentation on research findings on adult learner persistence. Indeed, over the past few years, adult learner persistence has become one of the most frequently discussed topics in California adult education. As a result, local adult education and literacy providers requested that the CDE identify resources on learner persistence and make them readily accessible to the field. The California Adult Learner Persistence Project is the direct result of those requests.

The California Adult Learner Persistence Project follows the same continuous improvement cycle used by many adult education agencies. The project helps local agencies gain access to relevant research, evaluate data, identify challenges, set goals, choose and implement strategies for change, and evaluate results. It fosters continuous improvement at the agency, program, or instructor level. The project is designed for "early adopters"—those local agencies that have conquered many of the fundamental challenges facing literacy providers and want to make significant improvements to the program.

The CDE acquaints adult educators with the persistence project through a coordinated marketing campaign featuring direct mail, e-mail, regional meetings, newsletter articles, and presentations at conferences. The CDE also sponsors and distributes summaries of research on learner persistence.

Professional development activities include workshops on learner persistence and related topics, site-based study circles, and networking and discussion groups held at 10 CALPRO Professional Development Centers (PDCs) located throughout the state. Each year, various local

agencies initiate site-based study circles, examining research on learner persistence. Workshops on learner goal setting, managed enrollment strategies, learning disabilities, and other issues are well received by practitioners. Educators also discuss their experiences with colleagues at site-based or regional study groups, networking and discussion groups, workshops and conferences, and with other educators across the state and the nation through the Literacy Practice, Research, and Policy Connections electronic discussion list.

Section 1. Adult Learner Persistence Online

The CDE also established an online adult learner persistence Web site at www.adultlearnerpersistence.org. The site lists self-assessment and program ideas, and it links to workshops, research articles, and other resources. Web site data show that persistence is a topic of interest far beyond California. Thirty adult schools have logged onto the site, as well as visitors from 24 states, Canada, Japan, and Egypt.

The learner persistence Web site helps agencies review research findings, formulate objectives, and then choose strategies to implement the objectives. Educators can read sample strategies compiled from national persistence research and from California's "Programs of Excellence: A Tool for Self-Review and Identification."

The learner persistence site's interactive guide helps local adult educators design a learner persistence implementation plan. Teachers and tutors use the site to find resources to improve their own instructional practice. After selecting and implementing the changes identified in the implementation plan, teachers and administrators are encouraged to document their experience.

Some administrators use the learner persistence site as a tool to evaluate their entire program; others examine a specific student population or instructional program. Many administrators evaluate their local agency or site level data, using one of two retention indicators. One option is to calculate the average number of hours of attendance for each enrolled student during a specific time period. Another option is to compare the percentage of learners with matched pre- and posttests. Either option results in baseline information that the agency can use to track changes in learner retention.

By examining baseline retention data, administrators gain insight into areas that can be improved. An agency with high numbers of students leaving the program shortly after enrollment might choose to examine its enrollment procedures, evaluate its orientation program, or examine its procedures for helping learners set meaningful goals. An agency with stronger retention averages might choose to emphasize instructional classroom strategies or student-directed learning.

Anecdotal information from adult educators indicates that the learner persistence project helps teachers and administrators better understand the challenges faced by their students. It also serves as a lens through which to view local agency practices, helping educators identify positive changes that will support adult learners in their education.

The following articles in this report describe California adult educators' experiences and findings from the California Adult Learner Persistence Project. Additional materials can be found through the CDE Web site at http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ae/ir/persistproject.asp.

The author: Wendi Maxwell created the California Research-to-Practice Initiative and the Adult Learner Persistence Project. She is project monitor for adult education professional development for California and works as an education programs consultant for the California Department of Education. Contact her at (916) 324-7115 or wmaxwell@cde.ca.gov.

Section 2. CALPRO Field-Based Research Initiative (FBRI) on Learner Persistence

In the fall of 2005, CALPRO invited adult education teachers in California to submit an application to participate in practitioner inquiry, or field-based research, on the topic of learner persistence. The application asked the respondent to identify a question related to learner persistence that the respondent would like to explore, e.g., *What happens to learner persistence when _____?* Applicants were to fill in the blank with a suggested intervention that they would like to put in place. CALPRO reviewed and selected seven teacher applications.

CALPRO then contracted with Dr. Alisa Belzer of Rutgers University to conduct the training on field-based research or practitioner inquiry. The first two-day training in December 2005 covered topics such as defining practitioner inquiry, defining learner persistence, forming the research question, collecting and analyzing data,and reporting findings and conclusions. The group then returned to their home schools to begin their studies. Throughout the process, Belzer was available to participants to answer questions, discuss protocol, and provide guidance as the teacher-researchers conducted their studies throughout the winter and spring of 2006. The group met in person two more times (March and May 2006) to review and provide feedback to one another on their progress. Participants submitted their reports during the summer of 2006, and Belzer worked with participants to refine their reports.

This section presents an introduction written by Alisa Belzer. It is followed by abstracts of the seven teacher-researcher studies.

Introduction to the FBRI

Alisa Belzer
Rutgers University

When I was asked to develop and facilitate a field-based research initiative on learner persistence for CALPRO, I was excited to be given this opportunity. I knew from previous experiences with practitioner inquiry groups (another name for field-based research) that the kind of collaborative, systematic data collection and analysis that comes from actual classrooms and programs provides not just meaningful professional development for participants, but also substantive new knowledge for the field that speaks to practitioners in unique ways.

When practitioners develop their own research questions, collect data in their own work contexts, and come together to analyze and make meaning from what they have gathered, the products of these efforts tend to address problems that other teachers recognize and struggle with, and identify solutions that are useful because they are grounded in the reality of practitioners' and learners' work together. Therefore, they have great "validity"—meaning in this case that their work resonates for others. Practitioners can read these project reports and recognize themselves, their classrooms and programs, and their learners in the descriptions of others. Given this resonance, there is then a high likelihood that they might rethink an assumption about learners or their own practice, or try something new that they have read about in the project reports. In this way, teacher by teacher and administrator by administrator, practitioner inquiry can make a real impact on the field. Given CDE and CALPRO's strong commitment to improving learner persistence by implementing multiple research-based strategies and by disseminating information through diverse modalities, I believed that the work of participants in this field-based research initiative would have an impact beyond California and beyond individual practitioners. What an exciting prospect, what a wonderful opportunity!

In planning how the seven participants would develop and implement their field-based projects on learner persistence, I based my thinking on my commitment to the importance of collaboration as a key ingredient of this process. We needed to meet face to face, and we needed to use technology to extend the value of these meetings when we could not meet in person. Our discussions needed to move back and forth between a focus on how to actually implement a field-based practitioner inquiry project and substantive discussions related to improving persistence. In other words, we needed to continue to develop participants' understanding of the *process* for designing, implementing, and writing

about their work at the same time that we needed to expand our thinking related to the *content* under investigation: learner persistence.

Initially, we met as a group for two and a half days in December 2005. During that time, the group explored their understandings of retention and persistence and discussed challenges and successes they had experienced in improving persistence. These discussions wove together research literature on persistence, which participants had been asked to read in advance of the training, with their own knowledge of learners and of classroom and program structures. We also spent time discussing the formation of research questions, data collection methods, and principles of qualitative research design. The workshop concluded with participants drafting an action plan that included a tentative research question and plan for implementing their projects. The participants were asked to submit a more finalized version to me for feedback by late January.

In response to a discussion of how we might continue to support each other's work between then and a final meeting in May, CALPRO established an electronic discussion list for the group and scheduled a conference call check-in. The purpose of the conference call was to provide the group an opportunity to help each other solidify their research questions—often a difficult process that requires many revisions. As winter wore on and the project work ebbed and flowed, it became clear that regrouping in a face-to-face meeting would be helpful, and CALPRO arranged for one additional meeting in March 2006. This meeting verified that participants were at different points in the process of implementing their projects: Most had collected some data, but some were still struggling over what exactly their research questions were. We spent one day together working as a group to help each participant move forward toward completion of that participant's project. This included sharpening research questions, extending data collection plans, giving feedback on data collection tools, and analyzing preliminary data.

For our final, two-day meeting in May, participants came prepared to discuss a draft report of their research that had been distributed prior to the meeting. Over this final two-day meeting, we spent time discussing each project to help participants sharpen their analyses and extend their thinking about the implications of their work. Participants revised their papers as a result of these discussions and subsequent to my providing them feedback on their drafts. They then submitted final papers over the summer, and I worked with them to make final revisions. The following pages contain abstracts of each of the research projects.

Participants in this initiative come from a variety of programs, ranging from a small community-based ESL program for Hispanic women in a rural community to large urban school districts and community college-based programs that serve a wide range of learners. They fill a variety

of positions from teacher to counselor to program administrator. Because of this diversity, their projects cover a wide spectrum of topics related to persistence.

When one looks at the projects as a whole, however, it becomes clear that persistence cannot be improved by tinkering with any one aspect of a program, nor can the causes of student drop-out ever be attributed to any one factor related either to the student or the program. Because of this reality, high persistence rates are the outcome of a complex combination of a student's motivation, identity, goals, expectations, understandings, and logistics, as well as program and teacher efforts to support, guide, inform, engage, help, and successfully teach adult learners who enroll in programs to meet their educational goals. No program efforts can address every challenge a learner faces in sustaining participation in formal education, nor can learner motivation alone always enable learners to remain in programs long enough to meet their goals. Programs must gradually assess every aspect of the instructional program to examine what they can do to improve services to adult learners. These papers offer a lens on those aspects that programs and teachers can assess and improve.

These projects are not of a sufficient scale to offer conclusive evidence that any one intervention significantly increases persistence. However, they do point convincingly to the importance of involving learners in sharing their perspectives on the topic of learner persistence. They make clear that asking learners about their experiences that impact persistence and using their perspectives to guide the improvement of practice and program structures can be important pieces of the puzzle. They also clarify the importance of teacher and program-wide effort to focus on potential improvements, rather than taking the "easy out" of blaming students or the complications of students' lives when they stop attending. Participants in this group learned from their students that there is only so much practitioners can do to support learner persistence. Without a deep commitment on the part of learners to persist and meet goals, programs can only go so far in helping. Conversely, it is clear that teachers and programs have a responsibility to reflect, revise, and revisit their practices in an effort to do all that they can to improve learner persistence.

Martha Robles, Quinn Harmon-Kelly, and Mihaela Ghiuzeli all designed projects that helped them learn more about their learners' experiences, perceptions, and goals for participation. They did so based on the assumption that this would help them respond more fully and precisely to their needs. In particular, the Harmon-Kelly and Ghiuzeli projects sought to shape instruction around learner goals. In the process, however, both teachers reexamined their assumptions about their learners and their own beliefs about teaching and learning. For all three teach-

ers, their investigations helped them know more about their students and gave them ideas about how to change their practice in ways that could better support persistence. Judy Solovieff took an honest look at herself as teacher during a semester when things went badly with regard to retaining students. Her paper makes clear that despite the importance of learner motivation and the identification of clear goals, a teacher who is distracted by other demands cannot succeed. She also used her inquiry to reflect on program structures that may impede a teacher's ability to do her best in supporting learner persistence. Nicki McBreen and Joan Guerra took up the program structures thread with their projects. They both implemented new program structures—a new student orientation in McBreen's program and distance learning in Guerra's—that were designed to help students persist. They both met with what they judged to be successful outcomes. Finally, Tina Bacon took a broader view on persistence by thinking about what could help students persist in their educational goals beyond completion of her program. This caused her to take a look beyond the program at community structures that fail to create the kinds of bridges for learners that could assist them in transitioning from ESL classes to postsecondary education and vocational training.

Taken as a whole, these seven field-based inquiry projects make a contribution to our understanding of how to support learner persistence, and they offer useful implications for practice.

The author: Alisa Belzer is an associate professor of adult literacy education at Rutgers University. She began working in adult literacy education in 1987 and has been a program coordinator, tutor trainer, classroom teacher, and tutor. Her research interests have been in the areas of authentic assessment, professional development and teacher research, policy, learner beliefs, and adult reading development. Contact her at belzera@rci.rutgers.edu

Keys to Long-Term Educational Persistence

Justina Bacon
Home Help for Hispanic Mothers

The Issue

At Home Help for Hispanic Mothers (HHHM), a program designed to help Latina women and their families become economically self-sufficient and assume leadership roles, we define persistence broadly. We believe that learner persistence must carry students beyond the scope of our program if they are to become successful contributing members of our community. My students have shown great learner persistence and success within our program; however, despite encouragement, students have not been successful in moving beyond my classes to pursue higher education.

As their English becomes more proficient, we encourage students to register for the High School Diploma Program, Regional Occupational Program (ROP) classes at the high school, and more advanced credit classes at Shasta College. Many of my students have enrolled in the High School Diploma Program. Fourteen graduated in 2005, but they continue to attend my multilevel ESL class and none have enrolled in ROP classes or Shasta College programs. I believe that, for ESL learners, student persistence begins with ESL instruction and then should proceed to earning a high school diploma, enrolling in job training or more advanced academic programs, moving on to internships, and finally entering the job market. However, at HHHM, it has been difficult for students to make the transition between ESL classes and advanced programs, and this has curtailed their long-term educational persistence.

Inquiry Questions

What keeps our students from persisting in meeting their educational goals by moving on to ROP or college programs?

What needs to happen before they feel they can move on?

Data Collection

I began my research with a survey that I gave to 20 students on the last day of the fall semester. I asked students what their goals were before they began attending ESL class, whether they had achieved what they hoped to in English classes, what their goals were now, and what they needed before they would be ready to move on to higher-level ESL classes, job training, or community college.

During the spring semester, I continued my research by conducting interviews with students and focused on the question, *What needs to happen before you feel ready to move on to job training or more advanced academic programs?* I interviewed 15 students who I believe have acquired the education and English language skills necessary to successfully complete an advanced job training or academic program.

Findings and Conclusion

In the survey, students responded that their most important reasons for learning English were to participate in the community and help their children in school. Yes, they would like to move on to job training programs, but they believed they were not ready. The three items they listed as necessary before they could pursue higher education were (1) computer experience; (2) one-on-one practice in English conversation; and (3) provisions for childcare during classes. In other words, the surveys seemed to indicate that they believed in long-term educational persistence, but there were specific, concrete challenges they needed help in addressing before they could act on their beliefs and meet their goals. In addition, their specific circumstances in life, such as age, education, work background, and their children's ages, also played into the equation.

I also learned that, in the small, rural town where HHHM is located, appropriate resources to support students' transition to more advanced educational opportunities are not always in place. Students often must overcome obstacles before they can gain the traction needed to move on. These obstacles include:

> A lack of computer skills;
> A need for increased self-confidence; and
> A need for career counseling.

In addition, a community infrastructure with improved communication, access, and support services is needed to provide students with bridges from one educational provider to another. When we provide supports to help students and their families prosper, we enable them to more easily persist in their educational endeavors and make the unique contributions that have traditionally made America innovative and strong.

So Why Are You Taking This ESL Class?

Mihaela Ghuizeli
Compton Adult School

The Issue

I feel that there has been a disconnect between my teaching and my students' expectations. This is driven, in part, by the fact that a typical ESL class includes students of widely diverse educational backgrounds and skill levels. For example, it is sometimes baffling to know how to meet the needs both of college-bound students who already hold a college degree from their native country and of housewives with limited formal education who want to improve their literacy skills to help their children with homework. I wrestled with how to address these widely different student needs, and I wrestled with whether I should teach towards academic or life skills. I decided to address this challenge by focusing on students' short- and long-term goals; I wanted to be able to respond to their needs and do everything possible to effectively serve this diverse student population.

I also had a more specific concern related to learner persistence. I noticed that low-literacy students who transferred from the beginning-level class to my ESL low/high-intermediate class had difficulty adjusting to the change. Many went back to the lower-level class. Although transition to a higher-level class naturally poses a challenge for many students, I suspected that I could do a better job of helping them smooth out the hurdles by attending to their specific educational goals.

Inquiry Questions

What happens when ESL low- and high-intermediate students are informally interviewed about their short- and long-term goals?

What are my students' specific short-term goals?

How can I assist them by gearing my teaching to better serve their specific needs?

How does the interview itself impact the students interviewed?

How do informal interviews and their findings impact on my teaching and influence learner persistence?

Data Collection

I selected students to participate who did not have formal education beyond high school. I also targeted students with good attendance. I

interviewed eight students who volunteered to participate. I asked them about their personal backgrounds, short- and long-term goals, opinions about class instruction, and feedback on the interview itself. Specifically, the purpose of the initial interview was to collect detailed information on how they view classroom instruction and whether it is meeting their needs. I used this information to make adjustments to instruction and to counsel students on pathways towards better meeting their specific goals. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to assess the impact of the changes made to keep the students focused, as well as to provide further information on their potentially changed goals. I conducted the interviews six weeks apart.

Findings and Conclusions

The students did have specific goals, but they explained that, to reach them, they must feel they are making progress toward the more global goals of improving language proficiency and building literacy skills. The interviews helped me understand that my students and I have a different understanding of what short- and long-term goals are. I argue that language learning is a long-term goal, in fact a lifetime goal, while my students view it as a short-term goal, a stepping stone towards finding a job or continuing education. I think of language learning as an organic process that is based on interactions inside and outside of class, at the workplace, and by tuning in to English language media. My students think of language learning as a crash course that is a prerequisite for employment or school literacy.

Specific short-term goals seemed to be strongly influenced by what primary role the learner identified with. Most believed that they needed to accomplish goals in a sequential order. They needed to meet with success in accomplishing the first goal before they could move on to subsequent goals. Based on student feedback, I concluded that, for students to feel that the class was helping them reach their goals, I needed to address their main expectation, which was to build literacy through direct grammar teaching, reading, and dictation. I tried to gear instruction towards this focus, in the hope that this would give them a sense of progress towards reaching their specific goals.

It is also noteworthy that the students had clear ideas of how to reach global goals. I believe that a teacher's practice should be informed by students' ideas about how to reach their goals so that students can feel that instruction meets their expectations and beliefs. However, my students seemed unaware that there is more than one way to approach a goal, especially the goal of language proficiency. For example, participating in a content class while also participating in an ESL class can serve a double purpose: it can build literacy and also address a long-term goal such as attaining the next educational level. Pairing these

classes is like "killing two birds with one stone." Consequently, as a result of the interviews, I advised some of my students to take a one-hour math class for GED preparation so that they could accelerate their work toward meeting their long-term goals while working on English language development. I argue that content classes integrated with language learning shifts the role of language from being an isolated learning task treated as an end in itself, which is the case with a stand-alone ESL class, toward becoming a medium of instruction in a content area. Short- and long-term goals can be merged to enhance a student's sense of fulfillment, possibly accelerate progress, and improve persistence.

The interviews, although short, produced a wealth of information on students' backgrounds, expectations, and goals. They informed my practice and helped my students clarify their goals. I used them as an opportunity to counsel students on participation in a range of other school programs available, and they said the process helped them stay focused. Because they were so valuable and time-efficient, I believe it is worthwhile to use them with the entire class. I would use an entire class session for interviewing my students and treat it as a one-on-one speaking-and-listening activity.

As a result of this research project, I began to view informal interviews as a viable tool in assisting my students. I acquired a better grasp of who they were, and I felt a stronger connection with them. They informed my practice because they voiced concrete suggestions. They also became better informed and more invested in their education.

Since completing my project, attendance of the three students who were participating in only the ESL class began to drop, at the same time that attendance of the four students taking it and GED or typing classes was still steady. Although I cannot prove it, I believe there is a correlation between the students' investment in the program and learner persistence. When more than one need is addressed, students may feel more grounded in the program and attend classes more regularly. Even if it does not always work that way, learning from students through brief interviews about their goals, expectations for ESL instruction, and the ways in which content and language instruction can be integrated seems likely to be a "win-win" situation. It has been in my classroom.

Distance Learning: Improving Student Persistence for the Adult Secondary Student

Joan Guerra
Fremont Adult School

The Issue

Based on discussions with students related to factors that help or hinder their persistence, I became interested in using distance learning as a vehicle for supporting our program efforts to enhance learner persistence. Although the Fremont Adult School had a distance-learning component for ESL and GED students, there was none for adult high school students.

Giving adult secondary students an alternative to on-site instruction just made sense to me. Many of our students transition into adult education from comprehensive or alternative high schools where attendance has been a problem for them. When they enroll in our program, they are faced with a rigid attendance policy: 60 hours of mandatory seat time to earn five credits. This requirement has often proven difficult for many students and impossible for some. Students often leave the program before the end of the quarter because they have not been able to meet the attendance requirement. Many simply cannot make it. Distance learning might be a practical alternative for some students.

Inquiry Question

What happens to student persistence when adult secondary students who experience difficulty attending classes on a regular basis are offered a distance learning option?

Action

Fremont Adult School offered a distance-learning option to high school diploma students beginning in late December 2005.

Working with an instructional aide, I set up several courses that could be offered in a distance-learning format. The instructional materials included textbooks, packets of worksheets, videos, Internet assignments, and Lifetime Library, a computer program that includes lessons in reading, writing, and math and that students can access at home. Each course took approximately 66 hours to complete. Completing a course could earn students five credits toward the total requirement of 190 credits to graduate with a high school diploma.

During an initial meeting, participating students and I discussed the expectations, requirements, and details of their specific courses. Each

student and I then signed a contract to formalize our discussion. Students were required to meet with me at least once every two weeks so that I could monitor their progress and check their work. All quizzes and exams had to be taken at the school site.

Data Collection

Twenty-two students signed distance learning contracts during the period of this study, which began on January 5, 2006 and concluded on May 10, 2006. I measured the attendance and progress of these students to determine the impact of the intervention on student persistence. Using attendance data from our student system, I determined that approximately 75 to 78 percent of the high school students who enrolled at the beginning of the quarter were still enrolled at the end of the quarter. I compared this figure with the persistence rate of students enrolled in distance learning. I also used attendance records to determine if students participating in distance learning were concurrently enrolled in regular classes. For those students who attended both distance learning and regular classes, I used attendance records to compare their persistence rates in regular classes and in distance learning.

I also examined student demographic data for both the adult school and the school district to gain information about the types of students who were taking advantage of the distance-learning option. I wanted to determine whether students participating in distance learning were representative of the general population of high school students, both at Fremont Adult School and Fremont Unified School District.

Finally, I kept a journal and field notes on interactions during informal meetings with distance-learning students to understand their experiences in working through their courses. I created an online intake survey to determine student motivation, need, and readiness for distance learning.

Findings and Conclusions

From my own small study, it appears that distance learners are more persistent than those students enrolled in regular classes. Of the 22 students enrolled in distance learning for the period of January 5 through May 10, 2006, 18 students persisted to the end of the semester. Thirteen students were still working on courses, two had completed one course and begun another, one had completed a course and transferred to another adult school, and two had completed a final course needed for graduation. Four students had been dropped for failure to meet the agreements of their distance-learning contracts, including numerous missed meetings and not turning in work in a timely manner. The persistence rate for this group of 22 students was 82 percent. Compared with persistence data for the 2004 school year, when persis-

tence was approximately 75 to 78 percent, distance learning seemed to promote a modestly improved persistence rate over that of traditional face-to-face classes.

Of course, it is possible that students in this small, self-selecting sample were more highly motivated to persist than the general student population at the school. I had assumed that most of the students who would enroll in distance learning would be students who were leavers from their regular classes. However, this was not the case: most of the students were blended distance-learning students, that is, they attended regular classes and enrolled in distance learning to accelerate graduation. Of the 22 students in this study, 18 were blended distance-learning students, and 4 were distance-learning students only. Some of the students seemed to respond well to the one-to-one relationship that formed between us, and this relationship also may have contributed to the increased persistence rate.

Innovative programs such as this one, as well as more personal and constant relationships between students and teachers, are education models that are both relevant and sensible for the population we serve. Offering adults a more convenient opportunity to participate in continuing education through distance learning is an idea whose time has come as a means for providing self-directed study for students who cycle in and out of programs.

Using Multiple Interventions to Encourage Student Persistence

J. Quinn Harmon-Kelley
Venice Community Adult School

The Issue

If you accept the base number of 100 hours as the minimum most students need to increase a grade level on a standardized reading test (Sticht, 1982), and the statistic that 50 percent of adult students drop out, many within the first three weeks (Quigley and Uhland, 2000), then finding a way to help students persist in their studies takes on real urgency.

Previously, I had participated in CALPRO training for facilitators of study circles on the topic of learner persistence; the CALPRO training employs study circle material developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). As a result, I read about the phenomenon of "stopping out," i.e., when students leave programs, they do not see themselves (or their teachers) as failing. Often, they are taking a break from participating because of circumstances in their lives, but they plan to return at some point. Over the years, I have heard from students how necessary it becomes to learn English. Yet, despite their strong motivation, the competing demands of work, friends, and families on our students' time often prevent their returning. Sometimes, they are too tired and feel unable to trade their only free time for class time. It seems most students need to be present at least 50 percent of the time just to keep up with the rest of the class. For the time they remain with my class, it is my goal to build a class that is as useful and interesting as possible. For students who are stopping out, I also need to have a bridge in place for when they stop coming to class. I want them to know they are still part of the class and they can continue their work even when they are not attending.

Inquiry Questions

What happens to student attendance when a variety of persistence support strategies are implemented?

How do these practices support or change classroom interactions and instruction?

Action

Rather than pin all my hopes on a single persistence strategy, I picked the four most appealing to me, as identified through the study circle readings. For the ESL class resuming after the winter break when I started this project, I planned to use three support strategies developed during the study circle time and one form that had been introduced, but not yet used. The support strategies included (1) administering a student interest survey, (2) using a learner goal-setting form, (3) keeping in touch with absent students by sending them work packets and an encouraging note, and (4) inviting former students as motivational speakers to address the class. I felt comfortable trying a number of things at once on the assumption that it is possible that where one might fail, another could succeed. With some modifications, I tried these interventions during two class cycles, winter and spring.

Data Collection

The student interest survey and goal-setting forms provided data for my study and also served as strategies to enhance learner persistence. I conducted informal observations in my classroom and conducted discussions with students to help me understand the impact of the strategies, and I analyzed attendance data.

Findings and Conclusions

Although I tried these persistence strategies with just two classes, I had been using learner persistence strategies on a less formal basis since I participated in the study circle. Last fall, I tried using just one intervention: I sent work home. The TOPSpro Persister Report indicates that the overall percentage of persisters at Venice Adult School is 50.38 percent. For the class last fall, the class percentage of persisters was 63.15 percent. The winter class, with four interventions, had a persister rate of 78.57 percent. This seems like a significant increase that could be attributed, at least in part, to the changes I implemented.

I always knew I would not really be able to measure the specific effect each individual persistence strategy had on class attendance. As class attendance continues to improve, I am still left wondering what share of attendance can be attributed to learner persistence strategies, what can be attributed to the increased profile immigration held nationally at the time I did this study, and what role other factors I may not even be aware of play in the equation.

I do notice now that students are more involved in class. For example, I brought in an additional class set of books and workbooks because there were a number of students who wanted more work if they finished an assignment early. One of my students is checking out a different

book from me to continue to work in his free time between classes. Students have picked up additional copies of worksheets to continue work at home. Spanish/English dictionaries have started appearing on desks. It appears to be a highly engaged class.

What I did not expect when I began this inquiry was how much I would change, how much more responsive I would become in lesson planning and practice. Clearly, it has had a significant impact on my practice. The lessons I take from this project are that, although the effects of individual interventions are difficult to quantify, it seems important to try a cluster of persistence strategies because different things will help different learners at different times. Additionally, it is unlikely any one strategy will be a "silver bullet" that influences persistence for all learners. Although some efforts may be more or less effective at different times with different learners, they are unlikely ever to adversely affect attendance, and they have the potential of making my teaching more on target for learners. This proved to be especially true of learner goal setting and the student interest survey.

Looking Through the Window

Nicki McBreen
Culver City Adult School

The Issue

As the counselor at the Culver City Adult School, I do all the intake evaluations and class placements for new and returning students. I meet with new students for approximately 20 to 30 minutes to identify their goal of either a GED or high school diploma, request transcripts, and tentatively choose a class so that they can get started. They then are enrolled in the program. It is at this point that the system seems to break down for so many students. Sometimes they never even make it back to begin the class. Other students start, but attend only for a short time before disappearing.

My colleagues and I have had numerous discussions about what might help more students transition successfully back into school and persist with their learning until their goals are met. The question of what happens to so many students who sign up for either GED preparation or high school diploma classes and then just disappear after one day or one week or one month is perplexing and frustrating, to say the least.

It is out of this situation that the idea of an orientation class grew. A casual conversation with the principal at our school regarding mandatory orientation aroused my curiosity again.

The Inquiry Question

What would happen if I implemented a mandatory orientation class before starting students in classes?

Action

Discussions with staff and students as well as reading research on learner persistence informed my thinking about what the content of the orientation class could be. The curriculum that I developed consisted of 16 sections divided over the two, three-hour sessions. Topics included classroom procedures, program options, study skills, test taking skills, goal setting, and time management.

Data Collection

Students answered brief questionnaires about their goals, fears, and questions regarding participating in the program at the beginning of the orientation and again at the completion of the class. After the second

session, I also asked evaluative questions about the orientation. Additionally, I met with individual students after a few weeks in the program to see how they were doing in the classroom. In a conversational format, I spoke to them at length about school, their feelings about school, and how they felt the orientation either did or did not help them in their endeavors in school.

Findings and Conclusions

Although it is sometimes difficult to get students to critique the program, their positive comments about the orientation class sounded honest and heartfelt. In general, the majority of students who attended the orientation class appreciated the information presented and the opportunity to spend some time reflecting on their goals with regard to education and the rest of their lives. Many felt it was good to take the orientation class before starting their academic work because it helped them know what to expect and what was expected of them.

From my perspective as counselor, a benefit of the orientation class was the opportunity it gave me to gain a much deeper understanding of, and build a stronger relationship with, students than is usually possible during the 20- or 30-minute intake interview. I feel a close bond with students who participated in the orientation, and that has been extremely positive. They stop by my office much more often than do the students who were not involved in this project. As their counselor, I believe I understand their individual circumstances much better than I do those of many other students.

Of the 43 students who attended either one or both of the orientation sessions, 36 (84 percent) continued on to start their classes at the Independent Learning Center (ILC), 4 (9 percent) attended briefly, and 26 (60 percent) attended regularly. Comparing these numbers with a random group of 43 students who had registered in the winter and spring of 2005, 34 (79 percent) actually started their classes in the ILC, 8 (19 percent) attended briefly, and 19 (44 percent) attended regularly. It appears that the number of students who actually started from the group who attended either one or both of the orientation sessions is only slightly higher than the random group. However, among those who participated in the orientation, regular attendance was significantly higher than that of a random sample of those who had not participated in the orientation. Additionally, orientation participants were significantly less likely to attend only briefly. Those who attended both orientation sessions had better attendance than those who came to just one.

As a counselor who talks to students every day, I believe that decisions to return to and to persist in school occur as a result of some kind of epiphany on the part of the student. I repeatedly hear from students who come to school regularly and are driven to complete their classes

that one day they realized that "I just need finally to do this." This often occurs when they bump up against a wall with regard to getting a job, or their children have reached school age and they want to help them with their school work, or they are concerned about the example they set for their children, or they are tired of being embarrassed about having dropped out. Whatever the reason—the motivation is different for every student—it is of equal importance in each of their lives. Until they reach that point where they believe that they have to complete this level of their education and are willing to do whatever it takes and put in whatever time is required, nothing we do can provide that motivation for them. Possibly the best reason to run these orientation classes, then, is to help students become more self-aware and better able to make educational choices for themselves. When they do fully commit to attending school, then we can provide tremendous assistance and encouragement. As with the salesmen and saleswomen in the shoe store, we need to help students find the shoe with the right fit. If the shoe fits, hopefully they will wear it.

I Was Afraid to Come Back:
Persistence from the Student's Point of View

Martha Robles
Adult Education Department, Cerritos College

The Issue

The class was busy with the low hum of students working in small groups. As I made my way around the groups to offer my assistance, I suddenly noticed a shadow out of the corner of my left eye. It was Alberto waiting by the door for my acknowledgment to enter class. "*Hi, Alberto, please come in. Nice to see you again,*" I said. Alberto was a good student, but he usually worked overtime and was habitually late. I was not surprised to see him come in late, but I was surprised to see him back in class at all. He had stopped attending in the middle of March, and it was now the end of April. I thanked him for returning to class, and told him we had missed him. Then, to my surprise, he said, "*I was afraid to come to class…afraid to come back, because I thought…I would be too far behind to catch up.*"

As any instructor does, I worry about my students when they disappear for awhile, but especially when I never hear from them again. I also want to identify and correct what I or the department is doing "wrong" so my students persist in their studies. I wondered whether I was failing to provide Alberto with something he needed and if that failure made him disappear and then caused him to be fearful about returning. The only way to unravel these questions was to go directly to my students for information.

Inquiry Questions

What prevents students from coming to class?

What helps students return to class?

Data Collection

The first step was to ask the students in my ESL and VESL classes to complete a quick survey, titled *English as a Second Language Class Evaluation,* at the beginning of the semester. In the middle of the semester, I provided class time for students to complete the first of two journaling activities; the students completed the second journaling activity at the end of the semester. The students had been practicing their listening and speaking skills all semester by asking each other a series of questions, so I decided to expand their practice by creating a similar

written question-and-answer format for this task. This activity provided extra English practice for them by asking questions similar to those they might answer on any form. I also interviewed students who returned to class after lengthy absences.

In all, I collected 27 student surveys and 46 journal entries, and I conducted 10 student interviews. I also kept personal notes based on classroom observations.

Findings and Conclusions

Asking my students directly for feedback was a powerful way for me to learn more about their circumstances and the factors that affect their persistence. Students' goals typically are broad: they want to "learn it all." However, my students' responses helped me see that I was wrong to worry that students are missing class because of something I may have said or done. According to their comments, they miss class because their work schedules change, their work becomes more demanding, they work overtime, or most frequently, because they or family members are ill. In other words, they are basically busy with work and family responsibilities and my class cannot always be a priority.

They see the classroom as the primary place to learn English, and they do little to continue with their studies when they cannot attend classes. Some students commented that they *would* study if they had a textbook to use at home. However, students also said they were often too busy to do any homework.

Many students reported simply that they return to class after extended absences when they can, but Alberto's situation made me realize that returning may sometimes be more complex than simply having the time. Perhaps Alberto was afraid to come back to class because he felt he would be too far behind when he did. If he had had materials and the assurance from me that he could return once his responsibilities had been met, he might have been less hesitant to return. According to his comments, he was afraid because he did not know the class rules about returning, or what he could do while away to keep up with his class work. Had he known these things, he might have been less fearful of returning. Realizing the importance of helping students know these two things is something that I have gained as a result of collecting and analyzing the data for this study.

In the end, this field research has been an exploration not of what prevents students from *leaving* a class, but how to prepare them to *come back* after absences from class. I think this is a more "doable" focus than trying to prevent absenteeism. In the future, I intend to build understanding among my students right from the start about what they can do to help themselves when they have to "stop out," and what the procedures are for returning to class when they can.

Righting a Class That Went Off-Course

Judith Solovieff
Vallejo Adult School

The Issue

For the first time in my 15 years in adult education, I recently had two classes that were difficult for me to handle and that I did not enjoy teaching. Among the various problems I encountered were unusually poor student retention rates and unusually poor student attitudes toward the course requirements and the teacher (me). As I contemplated what I would study for this field-based initiative, this extraordinarily negative teaching experience seemed like a good one to analyze systematically.

I know that persistence is a complicated phenomenon influenced by a range of factors. Many studies on this topic focus on the learner: learner attributes, learner goals, situational and dispositional barriers, and students' readiness to learn. However, my experiences seemed to indicate that challenges and issues with the teacher, classroom, and program also matter. I believe that analyzing what happened under nearly "worst case" conditions can help me think about what we can do to modify our teaching and programs to minimize the role they play in students' decisions to leave.

Inquiry Question

What are the contributing factors at the classroom and program levels that might influence (for better or worse) learner persistence?

Data Collection

I investigated this question by writing a detailed description of what happened and then engaging in reflection and analysis of this text. I also conducted interviews with some of my students and staff. I asked my students the following questions: *What did you like best about the Employability Skills class? Why? What did you like least? Why? What would you change? Why did you persist and complete the requirements? Why didn't you persist?*

Findings and Conclusions

- *Teachers' personal struggles affect learner persistence.*

    My students "picked up" the vibrations of my physical and mental exhaustion and intense feelings of stress caused by my attending

graduate school while working. The quality of my teaching and my student-teacher relationships began to deteriorate. I had forgotten one of the principles of good customer service that I had taught a few years ago: the art of self-management as the key to professionalism. This is easy to teach about in theory, yet very difficult to practice when one is extremely tired and struggling with personal issues.

- *Team teaching partnerships and other class and instructional factors that are not working smoothly can affect learner persistence.*

  I realized that a team-teaching arrangement I had made with a colleague to reduce some of my workload was not working well for anyone. It had become another source of frustration, and I had begun to harbor resentment and regret about the situation. My students were not satisfied with the arrangement, either.

- *Students sometimes experience teaching practices differently from what teachers intend or expect.*

  What I think is best for my students does not always coincide with what students want or need. When I inquired about this in interviews I conducted, I learned that students sometimes felt overwhelmed by all the assignments and did not see the relevance of all the requirements of my class. To some extent, these differences can be addressed by clear, open, honest two-way communication.

The big lesson learned is that persistence is not only about program supports, instructional strategies, and learner motivation. Sometimes teachers do things that put off their students. It is important to reflect on these, learn from them, and try to do things differently in the future.

Section 3. CALPRO Learner Persistence Study Circles

One of the first efforts in the California Adult Education Research-to-Practice Initiative was the establishment of site-based study circles. From June 2004 to the present, CALPRO trained more than 70 practitioners from 40 adult schools, community colleges, community-based organizations, and correctional institutions to facilitate study circles on learner persistence in their own agencies. The goal of these study circles is to create small learning groups of practitioners who support each other in translating research on learner persistence into meaningful practice. CALPRO considers learner persistence study circles successful when participants develop plans to use the research in daily practice or design and implement strategies for enhancing learner persistence at their agencies.

Study circle participants meet three times over a period of six weeks. Each meeting typically lasts three hours. Prior to each study circle meeting, participants read several selected pieces of research on learner persistence. During the study circle meeting, members engage in interactive exercises and discuss how the research can inform their classroom practice as well as the policies and procedures of their agencies.

Facilitators follow a study circle guide on learner persistence developed by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), which includes relevant articles and research summaries on learner persistence.* While conducting study circles at their agencies, facilitators share experiences and receive support from each other and from CALPRO staff through their participation in an electronic discussion list. As they read and discuss the research articles, study circle members formulate ideas for applying the research to their own practice. CALPRO supports participants throughout the study circle process by distributing meeting summaries, participant and facilitator suggestions and reflections, action plans, force field analyses, and results of study circles. After they have completed the series of three study circle meetings, CALPRO invites facilitators to attend at least one follow-up session to refine their agency's action plans for implementing learner persistence strategies and to conduct a fourth study circle meeting at their agencies in which participants discuss implementing their action plans.

Following are documents resulting from the first three years of California's study circles on learner persistence. The ideas and suggestions listed here may prove helpful to other adult educators who wish to enhance learner persistence at their agencies.

Techniques for Improving Learner Persistence:
A Summary of Participant Suggestions, October 2005

Techniques for Responding to Ideas Generated in Study Circle
Facilitators' Follow-Up Meeting Notes, October 2005

Taking Action: Steps to Increase Learner Persistence
Facilitators' Follow-Up Meeting Notes, October 2005

Sample Action Plans

* See NCSALL's study circle guide *Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education.* http://www.ncsall.net/?id=896

Techniques for Improving Learner Persistence:
A Summary of Participant Suggestions
October 2005

In the fall of 2004 and the spring of 2005, CALPRO sponsored study circles focusing on the issue of learner persistence. Twenty-four agencies across the state held study circles, with a total of 180 participants. During the study circles, participants read and discussed research related to learner persistence and brainstormed ways in which teachers and programs might improve learner persistence. The following suggestions are the result of these brainstorming sessions. Opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this list are those of the study circle participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the California Department of Education.

Attitudes

1. Teachers can
    a. Create a welcome, fun, and supportive learning environment that is respectful of learners' individuality;
    b. Demonstrate accepting, compassionate, and non-judgmental attitudes;
    c. Provide positive role models to inspire students to achieve their goals;
    d. Model positive attitudes toward work and life;
    e. Have a sense of humor in the classroom;
    f. Acknowledge that students' lives are complicated;
    g. Strive to be understanding about why students feel the need to drop/shop while continuing to convince them not to;
    h. Be careful not to apply their values to learners' experiences or needs;
    i. Not assume that students had negative K-12 experiences.
2. Programs must make a firm commitment to learner persistence (e.g., walk the talk).

The Student-Teacher Relationship

Teachers can
    a. Strive to design classes to consist primarily of learner-centered instruction as opposed to teacher-centered instruction;
    b. Strive to be active listeners;
    c. Make an effort to learn and remember students' names;
    d. Show a sincere interest in their students.

Communicating with Students

Teachers or programs can
    a. Hold monthly "dine with the Dean or Program Director " events;

    b. Create more one-on-one communication with learners;
    c. Take time for in-depth student interviews;
    d. Ask students why they attend classes;
    e. Ask students to think about why other students stop attending.

Intake

Teachers or programs can
    a. Post detailed information on the agency's Web site to give students a good sense of what to expect in classes;
    b. Use a buddy system during orientation to match students, based on their first or native languages;
    c. Include statistics in intake presentations about how education is related to success.

Planning and Goal Setting

Teachers can
    a. Ask their students frequently what they want to learn;
    b. Survey students frequently regarding their needs and goals and whether they think that instruction is helping them meet their goals;
    c. Use checklists in surveys;
    d. Teach lessons on learner goal setting;
    e. Encourage their students to establish clear and attainable goals to set the purpose for learning;
    f. List student goals as specific tasks to be accomplished;
    g. Demonstrate high expectations for students.

Class Structure

Teachers can
    a. Support student-directed learning;
    b. Provide opportunities for students to self-select their curriculum;
    c. Support student-driven establishment of classroom procedures/rules;
    d. Focus on increasing interactions between students;
    e. Conduct learner-to-learner interviews;
    f. Attend to community building as part of lessons;
    g. Provide peer tutor and other opportunities for students to work in pairs/groups;
    h. Help form student buddies to create class ties;
    i. Vary the instructional strategy, e.g., games, field trips, guest speakers, use of engaging visuals;
    j. Use kinesthetic activities in the classroom;
    k. Increase activities that focus on making students feel personally invested, such as journaling or oral histories about their educational experiences;
    l. Incorporate modular or "chunked" lessons that build towards a final product;

m. Incorporate group projects or cooperative learning;
n. Vary grouping strategies within the classroom;
o. Emphasize SCANS competencies.

Organizational Strategies

Teachers can
a. Offer concrete planning using student calendars and other organizational/time management strategies;
b. Create student timesheets and timelines for accomplishing tasks;
c. Overtly tell students what the focus of the class is and why it is relevant;
d. Focus on clarity of purpose.

Recognizing/Providing for Success

Teachers can
a. Stress success and reward success;
b. Praise students for even small successes;
c. Plan for opportunities to celebrate student success;
d. Create concrete recognition of success (e.g., portfolios, folders, certificates);
e. Create success charts;
f. Recognize short-term goals (e.g., Post-Its for 20 hours of instruction, tote bags for 60 hours);
g. Try journaling with students about their strengths and successes.

Support

Teachers (and programs) can
a. Be responsive to student needs so that trust is established;
b. Provide one-on-one counseling for all students;
c. Identify barriers to learner persistence for all their students as well as work with each student one-on-one to develop a plan to address the barriers;
d. Encourage students—always;
e. Try checking in with students who dropped the class (e.g., calling, sending postcards, using the buddy system to make contact with absent students);
f. Consider compiling a class list or phone tree of student names and telephone numbers (purely voluntary) to distribute among classmates;
g. Ask students to identify the forces (positive and negative) that affect their persistence, and then help them create a plan to deal with the negative forces;
h. Create a list of motivational speakers (including former students and community members) who can visit the classroom;

i. Have a table at local neighborhood events to promote the program;
j. Develop community partnerships.

Program Structure

Programs/Agencies can
a. Support or try out managed enrollment to decrease classroom turbulence, which can impact negatively on learner persistence;
b. Consider two-hour class times to decrease absenteeism;
c. Consider planning and hosting events that involve students' families and communities (e.g., job fairs, family readathons);
d. Create a student council;
e. Facilitate the creation of student groups.

Assessment

Teachers can
a. Provide opportunities for students to monitor their own progress by charting their performance on spelling tests;
b. Provide students with their test scores and with strategies to improve performance on future tests;
c. Promote and model student self-monitoring for academic progress;
d. Hold weekly exams (and provide certificates of accomplishment);
e. Hold mid-term evaluations.

The Classroom Environment

Teachers can
a. Create a wall of graduates;
b. Create a wall of photos and cards from students;
c. Ensure a safe and secure facility for learning.

Teacher's Reflective Practice

Teachers can
a. Discuss how to balance relevant education with the use of textbooks;
b. Conduct reflective observation;
c. Define the characteristics of a teacher with high student retention rates;
d. Read about the intersection of persistence and quality teaching;
e. Keep in mind students' cultural differences;
f. Focus on what they can control;
g. Not take it personally if/when students stop attending classes.

Techniques for Responding to Ideas
Generated in Study Circles
Facilitators' Follow-Up Meeting
October 2005

In October 2005, CALPRO conducted a follow-up meeting for study circle facilitators and their administrators. The goal of the meeting was to identify ways that programs can respond to ideas generated in study circles. During the meeting, small groups worked to draft action plans that addressed the following questions, each of which is essential in implementing change:

- What change would you propose to address learner persistence issues?

- What is the problem that the change is addressing?

- What sources of information provide background on the problem and/or the proposed change?

- Can you identify relevant data?

- What are potential resources to draw on when instituting the change?

- What are potential barriers a program may face when trying to make this change?

- What are some ways to address the barriers?

The groups drafted action steps for the implementation of the projects. For each action step, they identified

- The individuals responsible,

- The length of time required to complete the step,

- The required resources, and

- How progress towards the completion of the step would be evaluated.

Sample project descriptions and draft actions plans are presented here. They offer ideas and insights into ways in which site-based professional development, such as study circles, can support systemic change.

Project One

Suggested Change	Institute teacher reflective practice
Problem Addressed	Teachers need skills in the area of self-observation.
	There is a need for staff development to be a cyclical process in which teachers reflect on what they've learned and done.
	Programs must address the needs of teachers who are resistant to systemic change.
Sources of Information	NCSALL
	Feedback from managers, students, peers, mentors
	Literature review of research in area
Relevant Data	Persistence rate
	Learning that occurs
	Success rates
	Videotapes of self-teaching
Potential Resources	Videotapes of self-teaching
	Co-workers
	Staff development workshops
	CALPRO
	Checklists for observation (of other teachers)
	Checklists for self-reflection
	Department meetings
Potential Barriers	Fear (including fear of the unknown)
	Resistance
	Inaccurate self-perception
	Absence of faith
	Fear of results being used against oneself
	Resistance to "persistence" concept
	The amount of work to institute this
	Resistance to accepting personal responsibility
Ways to Address Barriers	Staff development
	Support at all levels
	Clear objectives
	Top-down and bottom-up processes
	Non-threatening, peer presenters at instructional levels

Project Two

Suggested Change	Improve learner goal setting by involving students in an ongoing process
Problem Addressed	Lack of goal setting and/or poor follow-up to goal-setting activities Students 'floundering'
Sources of Information	OTAN CALPRO Any number of print and online books/materials
Relevant Data	Learner progress data Learner persistence data
Potential Resources	Assessment (placement, etc.) to determine if goal is attainable Other successful teachers/programs
Potential Barriers	Teachers not experienced in teaching the process of goal setting Students not experienced in the process of goal setting A feeling of lack of progress Failing to revisit the stated goals
Ways to Address Barriers	Integrate 'goal setting' into lesson plans Class time spent analyzing a progress chart Revisit goals

Project Three

Suggested Change	Examine the Intersection of Persistence and Quality Teaching
Problem Addressed	Need to identify the teaching strategies that support and detract from learner persistence
Sources of Information	NCSALL OTAN CALPRO Student surveys TOPSpro Attendance Teachers' feedback

	Classroom observation
	Student learning
Relevant Data	Attendance
	Learning gains
	Results from student/teacher surveys
	Classroom observations
Potential Resources	Mentor teachers
	Other staff
	Students' development
	Professional Development Centers
	NCSALL research
	ESL Institute
	Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA)
	Peer (buddying) pairings
	Coaching
	Credential clearing coursework
	Student advisory committee
	Mentoring grants
Potential Barriers	Funding
	Time
	Teacher resistance
	Turnover of part-time teachers
	Scheduling
	Identifying mentoring teachers
	Lack of administrative support
Ways to Address Barriers	Grants
	Flexible scheduling
	Early involvement of teachers (prior to implementation)
	Activities to build collaborative spirit in organization (like opportunities to share best practices)
	Pay or other incentives (e.g., food) for participation

Sample Action Plans Drafted by CALPRO Learner Persistence Study Circles

Project 1 Draft **Institute Teacher Self-Reflective Practices**

Action Step	*Individuals Responsible*	*Timeline*	*Required Resources*	*Evaluation Criteria*
1. Develop committee to identify sources of information and research on successful practice; Develop mission statement for process	Facilitator; Faculty from various disciplines	ASAP (first semester)	Online discussion groups; NCSALL; Personal contacts; Local CALPRO library/resource center	Development of detailed mission statement and plan
2. Develop materials for teacher self-reflection and training and awareness	Subcommittee of teachers from each discipline	First semester	Money for substitute teachers; Room/facilities; Preexisting materials to adapt	Completed materials
3. Field test instruments	Committee members	ASAP (second semester)	To be determined or reflective practice training and awareness materials developed by subcommittee	Complete evaluations and revisions, if necessary
4. Identify ways to recognize and document successful teachers and strategies	Subcommittee of initial committee	Begin in first semester (planning stage requires 6 months)		
5. Develop pilot plan for recognizing successes	Initial committee	Beginning of Year 2; add new cohorts yearly	Input from teachers about ways to recognize and reward teachers; Meal for staff who participated in the project	Successful implementation; Five percent increase in learner persistence
6. Longitudinal correlation study with reflection results and classroom persistence rate	Researcher	Beginning of Year 2	Collected data on persistence and reflections from both participating and nonparticipating teachers	

Sample Action Plans Drafted by CALPRO Learner Persistence Study Circles (Cont.)

Project 2 Draft Improve Learner Goal Setting by Involving Students in an Ongoing Process

Action Step	*Individuals Responsible*	*Timeline*	*Required Resources*	*Evaluation Criteria*
1. Develop a rubric or needs assessment questionnaire; Distribute at own and other agencies	Teachers; Curriculum specialist	1 week	Questionnaire or survey (with or without narrative)	
2. Compile and distribute results of questionnaire	Curriculum specialist; Committee or team	2–3 weeks	Collected questionnaires; Narrative summary form	Consensus of need; Possible list of tools, materials, and/or resources
3. Research and choose several goal-setting tools	Goal-setting subcommittee or team	3 weeks	Copies of all proposed tools and materials	Feedback from teachers and students
4. Train teachers to implement goal setting in the classroom	Trainers (can be skilled teachers)	3 weeks	New tools and materials; Time; A trainer	Evaluation of training
5. Reassess processes to evaluate success	Curriculum specialist	3 weeks	Observation	Observation of goal-setting practices in classrooms, orientation, intake, and other settings; Determination that follow-up is occurring

Project 3 Draft **Examine the Intersection between Learner Persistence and Quality Teaching**

Action Step	Individuals Responsible	Timeline	Required Resources	Evaluation Criteria

1. Establish criteria for
  a. Scope of project and delivery system
  b. Selection of materials
  c. Mentoring
	Change team; Administrator and teacher, or Program leader and teacher	1–2 weeks	Computer with Internet access; CALPRO Assistance	Collection of information gathered on which to base the criteria;
				List of criteria

2. Gather materials on effective instruction and learner persistence; Decide which to use in study circle design.	Change team	1 week	Same as above	Collection of sufficient materials from which to select
3. Review articles based on chosen criteria (using study circle format); Collate materials.	Change team	1 week	Articles previously gathered	Consensus on which articles to use
4. Develop study circle construct, including an action plan	Change team (and staff developer if applicable)	1 month	Models for effective study circles	Can the change team; Develop a study circle and related presentation
5. Identify mentors and make them a part of the change team.	Change team	Depends on size of agency	Teacher schedules and adequate time	List of mentors who are willing to participate
6. Clarify roles of mentors through pre-training	Change team or mentor trainer	2 hours	Mentoring resources; Study circle materials	Participant evaluations of pre-training
7. Present study circle	Change team or staff developer	3 hours	Study circle materials	Participant evaluations of training
8. Mentor study circle participants	Mentors	6 weeks	Mentor observation forms; Mentor coaching forms	Mentors' evaluations of process; Participants' self-evaluations
9. Debrief mentors Discuss next steps	Change team; Mentors	2 hours	Mentor observation forms; Mentor coaching forms	Mentors' evaluations of process; Participants' self-evaluations

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