# Retention Strategies for Adult Educators Part 1

## REL Southeast, in partnership with the Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators, and the Florida Department of Education

# Acknowledgement and disclaimer

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# Session Goals

1. Review the current literature on adult education retention
2. Consider and discuss retention strategies in adult education
3. Consider and discuss barriers to increasing retention rates in adult education
4. Select a strategy to implement

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# Decision Making and Coaching in Adult Education

Researchers in the adult education field have noted that adult literacy practitioners often make important decisions about program design and practice based on opinion, prior experience, and trial and error (Beder & Medina, 2001). Advisors and researchers in Adult Education suggest that practitioners need coaching to become better consumers of research and active partners, "in the process of connecting research and practice" (Comings & Soricone, 2007). This type of coaching project is viewed as both relevant and important in supporting improvements in the field.

# Florida Data on Retention in Adult Education

Florida served 34,608 students in Adult Basic Education (ABE) in 2018/19 (Florida Department of Education, 2019). This project is focused on increasing retention rates in Florida adult education programs. The average rate of student retention between initial testing at entry to ABE and post-testing was only 46.1 percent for the 63 agencies across the state providing adult education, and 11 of those agencies post-tested less than 30 percent of their participating students. Only 16 of 63 agencies met the state target for student retention. In addition, studies have found that a minimum of 100 hours of instruction is needed by a majority of adults to achieve measurable progress between pre-testing and post-testing on reading comprehension standardized assessments (Comings, 2009).

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# Florida Survey Data on Literacy Practices in Adult Education

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) collected survey results in February 2020 from 133 adult educators across the state and reported the following:
Which literacy practices have you seen improve outcomes?

| | |
|---|---|
| Explicit vocabulary instruction | 72.93% |
| Extended text discussion | 60.15% |
| Writing in response to text | 57.14% |
| Use of text coding or graphic organizers | 37.59% |

# Florida Survey Data on Literacy Practices in Adult Education

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) collected survey results in February 2020 from 133 adult educators across the state and reported the following:

What are the most important practices in retaining students?

| | |
|---|---|
| Positive and collaborative teacher/student interactions | 87.22% |
| Multiple instructional approaches | 62.41% |
| Student goal setting | 56.39% |
| Student engagement and motivation | 88.72% |

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# Florida Survey Data on Literacy Practices in Adult Education

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) collected survey results in February 2020 from 133 adult educators across the state and reported the following:
Do you provide career counseling to assist students into transitioning to post-secondary educational options?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 85.71% |
| No | 14.29% |

# Florida Survey Data on Literacy Practices in Adult Education

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) collected survey results in February 2020 from 133 adult educators across the state and reported the following:

Do you have a system to regularly call students when they are absent?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 75.76% |
| No | 24.24% |

# Florida Survey Data on Literacy Practices in Adult Education

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) collected survey results in February 2020 from 133 adult educators across the state and reported the following:
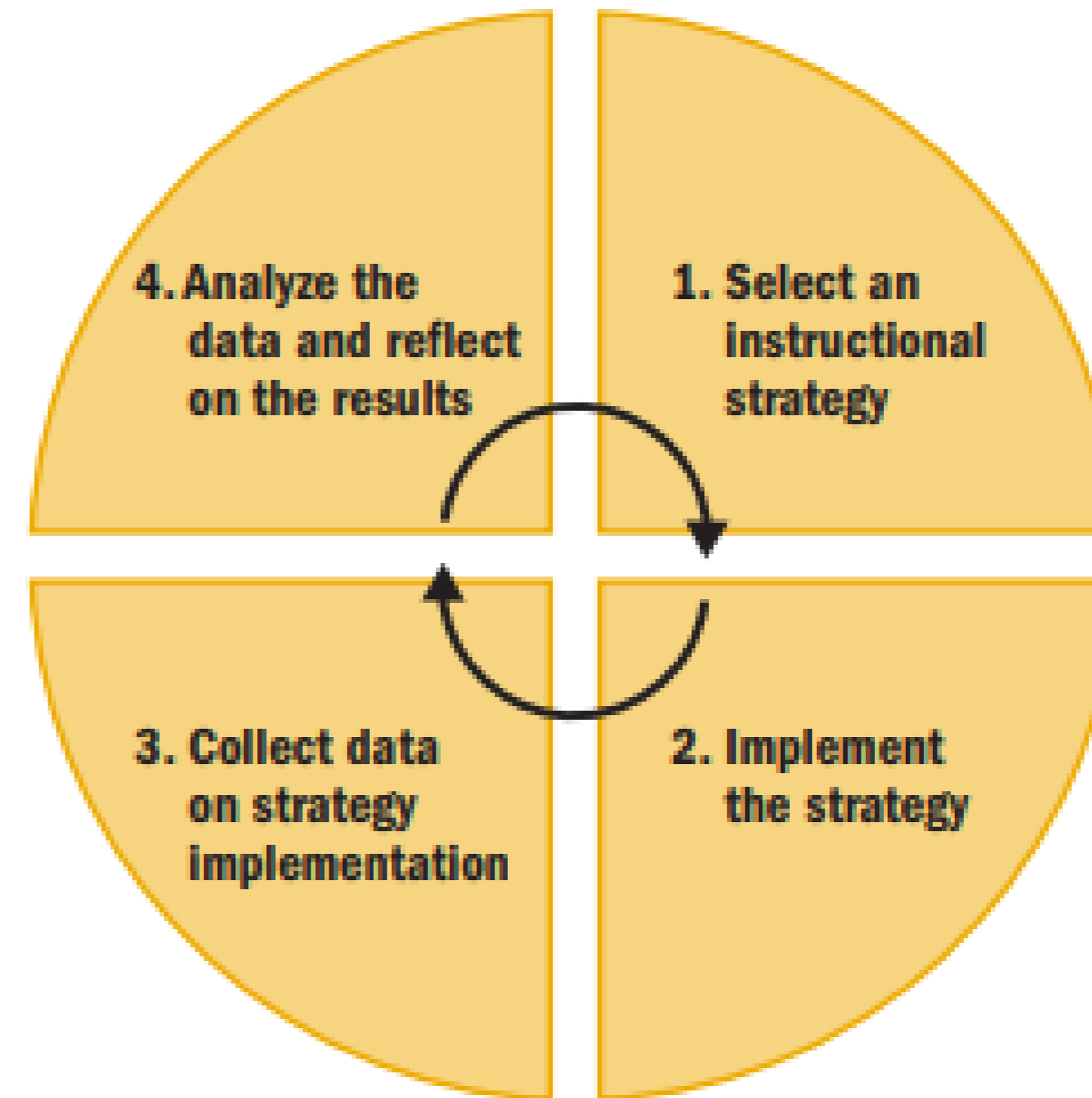Does your program conduct student exit surveys?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 36.36% |
| No | 63.64% |

# Instructional Improvement Cycle Toolkit

We will be discussing strategies for adult educators to consider focused on retention that may be used as part of an instructional improvement cycle. (Cherasaro, Reale, Haystead, & Marzano, 2015)

**Figure 1. Instructional improvement cycle**

4. Analyze the data and reflect on the results

1. Select an instructional strategy

3. Collect data on strategy implementation

2. Implement the strategy

**Source:** Authors' compilation.

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

This first session will include a review of literature focused on Adult Education retention and persistence.

Research points toward a few markers of success in Adult Education programs that may help increase retention: teacher knowledge and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies, strong teacher-student interactions, views on standardized assessments, and the ability of the program to tap into student motivational factors (Tighe, Barnes, Connor, & Steadman, 2013).

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

"Persistence can be seen as being comprised of two parts: intensity (the hours of instruction per month) and duration (the months of engagement in instruction). Persistence rates are reported as hours of instruction during a specific period of months, usually in increments of 1 year. Adult education programs often refer to persistence as retention and measure it by recording participation in formal classes or tutoring sessions," (Comings, 2009; p. 24).

Comings defines persistence as, "adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow," (2009; p. 25).

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# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Types of literature included in this overview:

**Randomized controlled trials (RCT)**

**Quasi-experimental designs (QED)**

**Qualitative studies**

**Mixed methods studies**

**Case studies**

**Literature reviews**

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# Why Care About Retention?

- It is estimated that 100-150 hours of instruction and practice are necessary for adult learners to make a one-year educational gain (Comings et al., 1999); yet, approximately, 58% of adult learns enroll in adult education programs for 6 months or less.

- Retention, motivation, persistence, attendance, success (GED attainment, learning gains, TABE/CASAS growth) often lumped together.

- More recent quantitative studies on retention broadly were prompted by a JREE special issue (4 RCTs; Alamprese et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2011; Hock & Mellard, 2011; Sabatini et al., 2011)
  - Studies report attrition rates between 38-54%
  - Minimal to no literacy gains across studies

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# Site/Program Factors

- Research has emphasized the need for program quality improvement to increase enrollment and retention (Belzer, 2007; Comings et al., 1999)
    - Programs should offer student orientation to set and outline realistic goals and expectations
    - Frequent progress monitoring (e.g., TABE testing)
    - Student access to counseling and life coach services
    - Tailoring instruction to student needs by doing hybrid instruction (in-person and online; Windisch, 2016)
    - Figuring out how to translate acquiring basic skills to the workplace environment (Windisch, 2016)
    - 52% spend less than 1 hour per week on writing instruction in adult education (Fernandez et al., 2017); 61% of students produce a paragraph or less each week

- AEPS Survey (2020)
    - 43% of programs do not have a structured college plan/path to employment for students
    - 33.5% do not offer flexible scheduling
    - 63.6% do not conduct exit interviews – these would really help understand barriers to retention
    - However on a positive note: 76% regularly call students who are absent
    - Many cited positive and collaborative teacher/student interactions, student goal setting, engagement and motivation, multiple instructional approaches as paramount to retaining students (consistent with Tighe et al., 2013 in quantifying success)

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# Student Factors

- Across multiple studies, common reasons cited for dropping out include transportation and childcare barriers, unsupportive relationships, family demands, busy work schedules, health-related issues, inconvenient class times, inattentive instructors, financial constraints, self-esteem and self-efficacy issues (Comings & Soricone, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2013; Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012, Quigley, 1995)

# Who Persists in Adult Education? (Comings et al., 1999)

- First large-scale study on persistence ($N$ = 150 interviewed)
- Employment status, gender, race/ethnicity not related to persistence.
- Older adults (over age 30)
- Non-native speakers
- Learners with clearly defined goals
- Learners with children (in particular grown children)
- Prior exposure to adult education
- Engagement in self-study
- Previous experience with schooling (students who rated past experience more positively as opposed to negative or neutral) but only for second language learners
- Researchers emphasize that is crucial for programs and teachers to build positive support systems and environments to help counteract student dispositional barriers

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# Who Persists in Adult Education? (Reading & Writing Special Issue)

- Understanding persisters from 4 reading RCTs

- Greenberg et al. (2013) – second language learners and older learners more likely to persist. Also, previous educational history, avoidance of reading, economic hardship, and phonemic skills, rapid automatized naming skills, and comprehension predict persistence. Completers of the intervention tended to be second language learning females with lower component skills.

- Similarly, Sabatini et al. (2011) and Mellard et al., (2013) noted an inverse relation between reading abilities and persistence (lower skills = higher persistence).

- Mellard et al., (2013) also noted greater life satisfaction and students' reporting more help and fewer obstacles.

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# Mixed Methods Approach Specific to FL (Tighe et al., 2013)

- Understanding success from the perspective of different stakeholders (state, teacher, student) in two Florida counties
- State (Quantified success using classroom value-added scores to identify more and less effective classrooms [based on initial TABE Reading scores and number of literacy completion points earned])
- Teacher/Student (Observed 11 classrooms identified as more or less effective; Interviewed 14 teachers and 28 students)

| Instructional Strategies/Teacher-Student Interactions | Views on Standardized Testing | Student Motivational Factors |

# What Characterizes More Effective Classrooms? Tighe et al., (2013)

- Two counties varied in implementation of programs
  - One county had a central ABE facility that developed a specific interactive instructional approach adopted by all teachers whereas in the other county teachers were entirely responsible for instruction, materials, learning.
  - On average, in County 1, must take 2.5 courses to earn 1 LCP; In County 2, must take 6 course to earn 1 LCP

- Multiple instructional approaches
  - Rotating in groups to different content areas
  - Whole-group instruction (lessons, reading newspaper)
  - Individualized (worksheets, on computer)
  - Peer editing

- Positive and collaborative teacher-student interactions
  - Celebrating birthdays and GED attainment
  - Attendance certificates
  - Colorful inspirational posters with students names on bulletin boards
  - Life skills (computer literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, anger management)
  - Students as integral to classroom culture

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# What Characterizes More Effective Classrooms? Tighe et al., (2013)

- Students engaging in goal setting
  - Field trips to look at different career options
  - Long-term goals of earning a diploma and specific career paths

- Students citing motivational factors such as family and personal fulfillment
  - Serving as role models for children
  - Need to validate their lives
  - Learning English
  - Pursue higher education or specific career path

# IES Partnership Grant – Georgia Partnership for Adult Education Research (GPAER) https://tcsg.edu/adult-education/adult-education-research-and-data/

- The researchers are interested in a large-scale, multi-site study to understand student-, teacher-, and site-level factors that may relate to enrollment, retention, and learner gains

## Program/Site Factors:
- Type of class site
- Frequency of class during week/weekends
- Technology in classroom
- Length of time administrator is in job
- Available childcare
- Accessibility of class
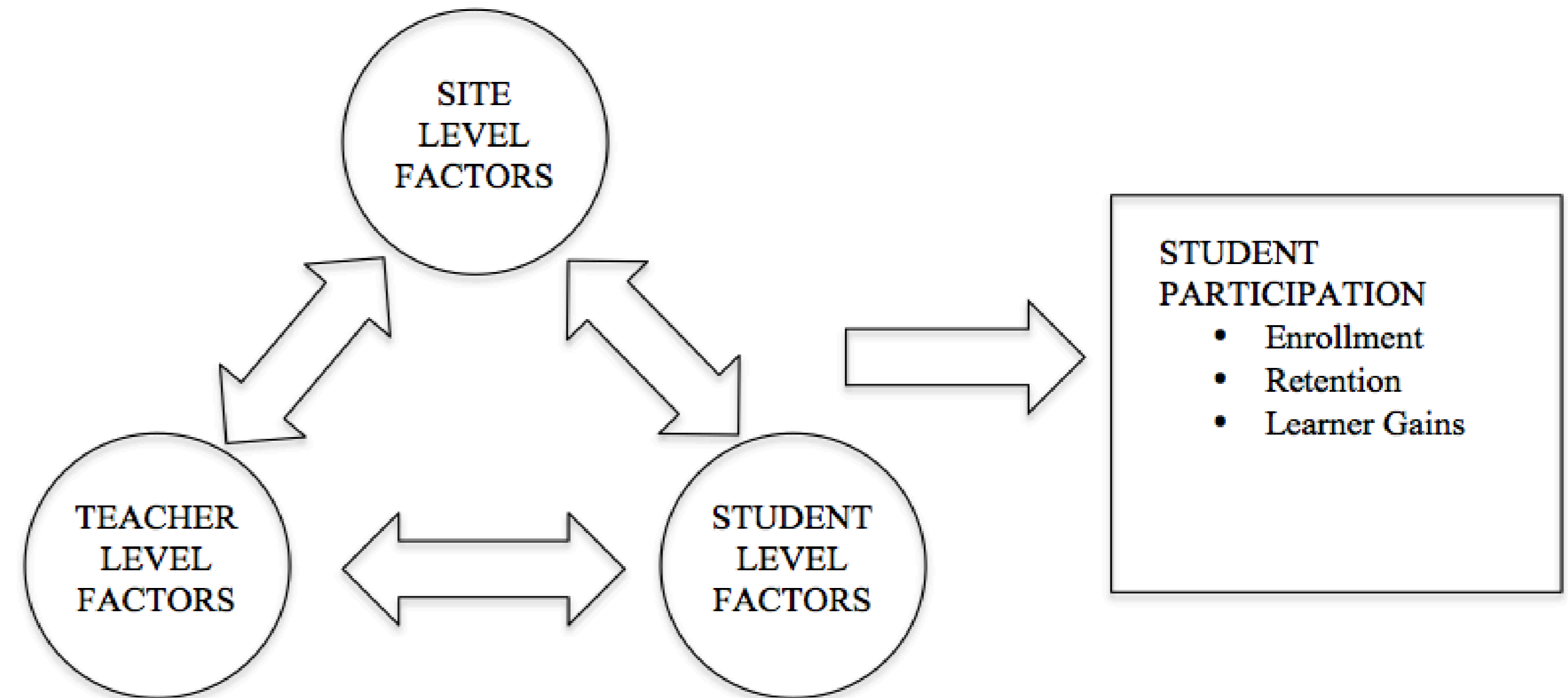
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## Teacher/Classroom Factors:
- Full or Part-Time
- Teaching experience (in years)
- Hours of PD
- Class size

## Student Factors:
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Age
- Entry Educational Functional Level
- Highest Level of School Completed
- Special Population Status (e.g., LD, homeless, ex-offender, migrant)
- Distance education indicator

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# Resources for Programs, Teachers, Students, Researchers

- Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) https://coabe.org
  - PD opportunities (webinars, trainings, resources, annual conference)
  - Awards for Adult Learner of the Year, Adult Education Teacher of the Year, Outstanding Administrator of the Year
  - COABE Journal – curriculum design, educational innovation, program development, learner engagement (now freely available)

- ProLiteracy https://www.proliteracy.org
  - Blog with student success stories
  - Adult Literacy Education Journal (freely available online) published twice per year has research articles, resource review, viewpoints
  - Grants and funds for program materials, digital education materials

- American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) https://www.aaace.org
  - Journals (Adult Education Quarterly, Adult Learning)
  - Annual conference
  - Newsletters, webinars, interest groups

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# Resources for Programs, Teachers, Students, Researchers (Cont.)

- Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy (PSU) https://ed.psu.edu/isal
  - Available research
  - Online certificate in Adult Basic Education as well as Family Literacy
  - More information and resources on other projects (IES partnership grant, Integrated Education and Training Initiative (IET) Library)

- Adult Literacy Research Center (GSU) https://education.gsu.edu/research-outreach/alrc/
  - Ongoing research
  - Resources – most recently COVID-19
  - http://csal.gsu.edu – repository of reading materials for struggling adult readers and teachers

- LINCS https://lincs.ed.gov
  - Promotes and disseminates evidence-based resources, PD, and you can find information by state
  - Online forums

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# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):

| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
| --- | --- |
| Quigley (2000) | Literature review |
| Addressing negative attitudes toward education | |
| Starting intake, orientation, and instruction with student goal setting and matching students to classes and classwork based on their needs | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Starting intake, orientation, and instruction with student goal setting and matching students to classes and classwork based on their needs (Quigley, 2000).

According to the IPDAE/FDOE survey, 56.39% of the 133 respondents noted that student goal setting was an important practice in retaining students.

Discussion: What does this look like in your setting? How can educators work with students to set goals and ensure that instruction is matched with needs?

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):

| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
|---|---|
| Quigley (1997) | Literature review and qualitative study |
| Providing evidence for the link between adult learner persistence and previous schooling experiences | |
| Underscoring the importance of the first three weeks of student participation in the program | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Providing evidence for the link between adult learner persistence and previous schooling experiences and underscoring the importance of the first three weeks of student participation in the program (Quigley, 1997)

Discussion: What does this look like in your setting? How can educators ensure that previous schooling experiences are considered and that the first three weeks of student participation are enhanced?

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# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):
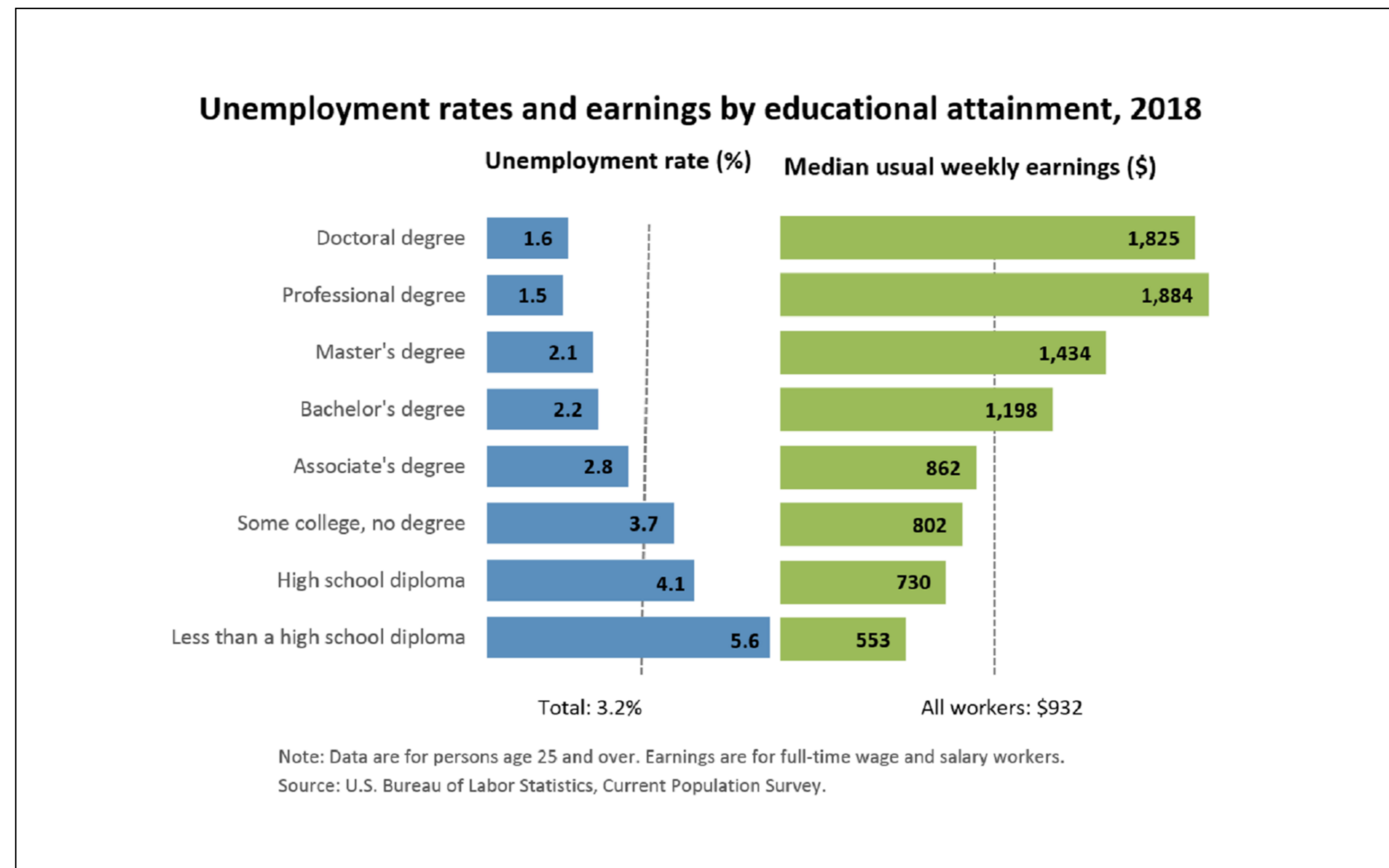
| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
|---|---|
| Beder (1991) | Literature review |
| Assisting students to understand the cost-benefit analysis of program participation and persistence | |
| Aligning program services with learner motivations and life contexts | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Assisting students to understand the cost-benefit analysis of program participation and persistence (Beder, 1991)

Discussion: How can educators ensure that students understand the cost-benefit of program participation?

Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment

**Unemployment rates and earnings by educational attainment, 2018**

| Educational attainment | Unemployment rate (%) | Median usual weekly earnings ($) |
|---|---|---|
| Doctoral degree | 1.6 | 1,825 |
| Professional degree | 1.5 | 1,884 |
| Master's degree | 2.1 | 1,434 |
| Bachelor's degree | 2.2 | 1,198 |
| Associate's degree | 2.8 | 862 |
| Some college, no degree | 3.7 | 802 |
| High school diploma | 4.1 | 730 |
| Less than a high school diploma | 5.6 | 553 |

Total: 3.2%     All workers: $932

Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

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# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Aligning program services with learner motivations and life contexts (Beder, 1991)

Discussion: How can educators ensure that their program is aligned with learning motivations and life contexts?

"Adult education research related to teaching materials suggests using adult-oriented or contextually relevant materials. These materials may be effective because they increase student motivation and engagement," (Kruidenier, MacArthur, & Wrigley, 2010).

Programs may want to, "fit instruction to the needs and learning styles of adults," so that they look "less like schools and more like an activity in which adults would want to participate," (Beder, 1991).

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):
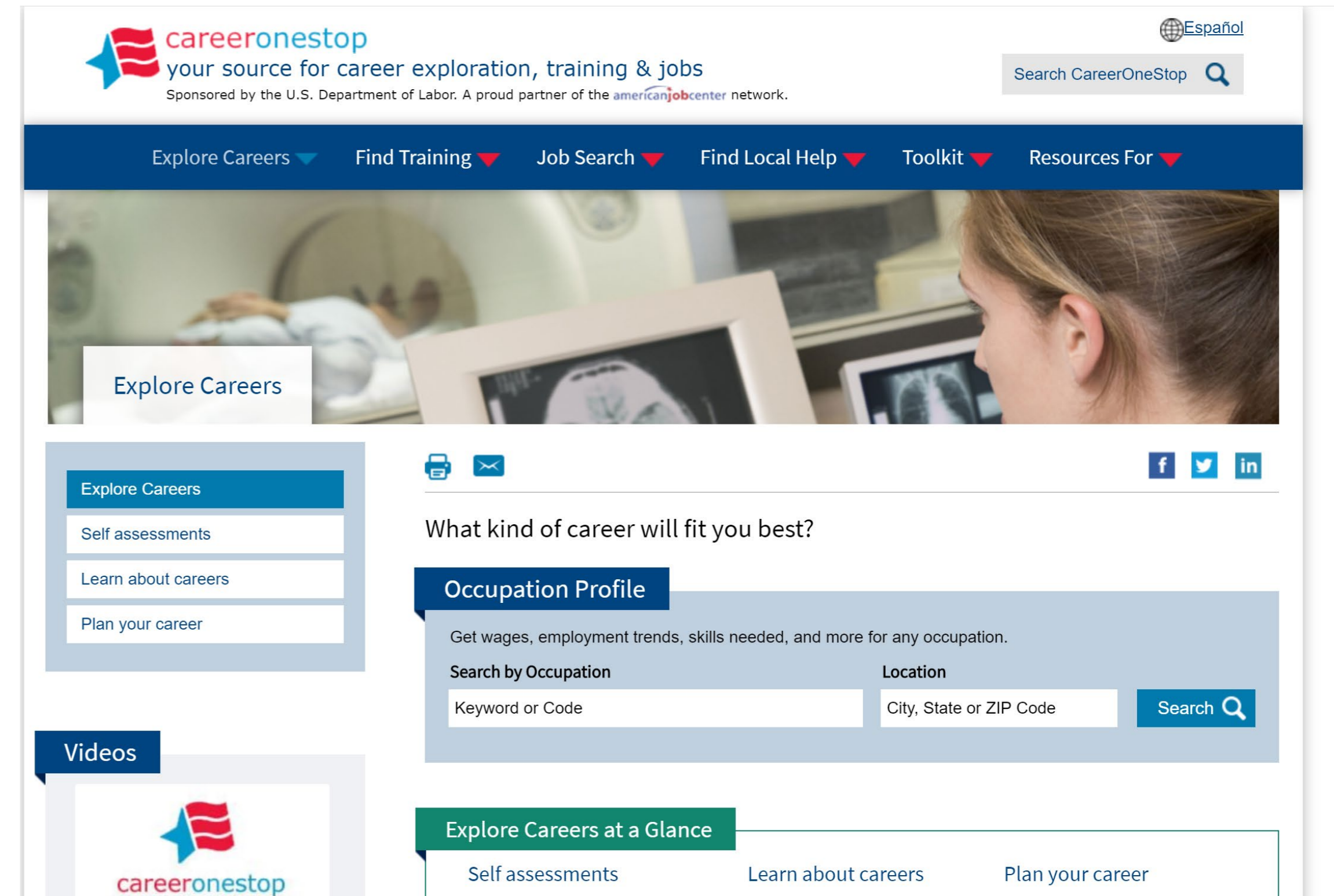
| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
|---|---|
| Meder (2000) | Quasi-experimental study |
| Engaging learners in discussion of motivational issues | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Engaging learners in discussion of motivational issues (Meder, 2000)

Discussion: How can educators ensure that learners are engaged in discussions of motivational issues?

This may involve helping students consider pursuing higher education or specific career paths and serving as role models for children (Tighe et al., 2013). Student progress and achievement should be formally recognized.

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):

| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
|---|---|
| Cuban (2003) | Case studies |
| Adapting program curriculum and schedules to the needs and interests of students | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adapting program curriculum to the needs and interests of students (Cuban, 2003)

Discussion: How can educators ensure that the program curriculum is adapted to the needs and interests of students?

It may be helpful to focus on integrating instruction with job-related tasks and highlighting the learner's role as a worker (Kruidenier, MacArthur, & Wrigley, 2010).

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Adult Education persistence research suggests that practices aligned with the following key findings may support Adult Education program retention (Comings, 2009):

| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
|---|---|
| Tracy-Mumford (1994) | Literature review |
| Outlining key characteristics of persistence plan that supports students and informs instruction | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Outlining key characteristics of persistence plan that supports students and informs instruction (Tracy-Mumford, 1994)

Discussion: How can educators ensure that there is a persistence plan in place that supports students and informs instruction?

"Because student goals can change, the program must be willing to make adjustments to accommodate new goals as they arise," (Tracy-Mumford, 1994). Involving students in a process of thinking about their motivation to participate and ways to sustain that participation helps them persist in learning.

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Research points toward a few markers of success in Adult Education programs that may help increase retention:

| Researcher | Nature of Inquiry |
| --- | --- |
| Tighe et al. (2013) | Mixed methods |
| Teacher knowledge and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies | |

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Teacher knowledge and implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies (Tighe et al., 2013)
According to the IPDAE/FDOE survey, educators reported that the evidence-based literacy practices below from the IES/WWC Practice Guide: Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices (Kamil et al., 2009) have improved outcomes.

| | |
|---|---|
| Explicit vocabulary instruction | 72.93% |
| Extended text discussion | 60.15% |
| Writing in response to text | 57.14% |
| Use of text coding or graphic organizers | 37.59% |

Discussion: What does this look like in your setting? How can educators ensure that evidence-based instructional strategies are implemented?

# A Literature Review of Retention and Persistence in Adult Education

Comings et al., (1999) recognized several barriers to persistence in adult education including life demands, relationships with others who did not support persistence, and poor self-determination.

Discussion: What do these barriers look like in your setting? How can educators address these barriers to ensure that students persist?

Comings et al., (1999) provided four findings that support persistence:
- Establish student goals
- Increase student sense of self-efficacy focused on specific tasks
- Help students manage positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence
- Ensure progress toward reaching a goal

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# Instructional improvement cycle toolkit Part 1: Planning guide, Route 1, Step 1

From the IES/WWC Practice Guide: Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making (Hamilton et al., 2009)

**Recommendation 1. Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement**

☐ Collect and prepare a variety of data about student learning.

☐ Interpret data and develop hypotheses about how to improve student learning.

☐ Modify instruction to test hypotheses and increase student learning.

**Figure 1. Data use cycle**



- Collect and prepare a variety of data about student learning
- Interpret data and develop hypotheses about how to improve student learning
- Modify instruction to test hypotheses and increase student learning
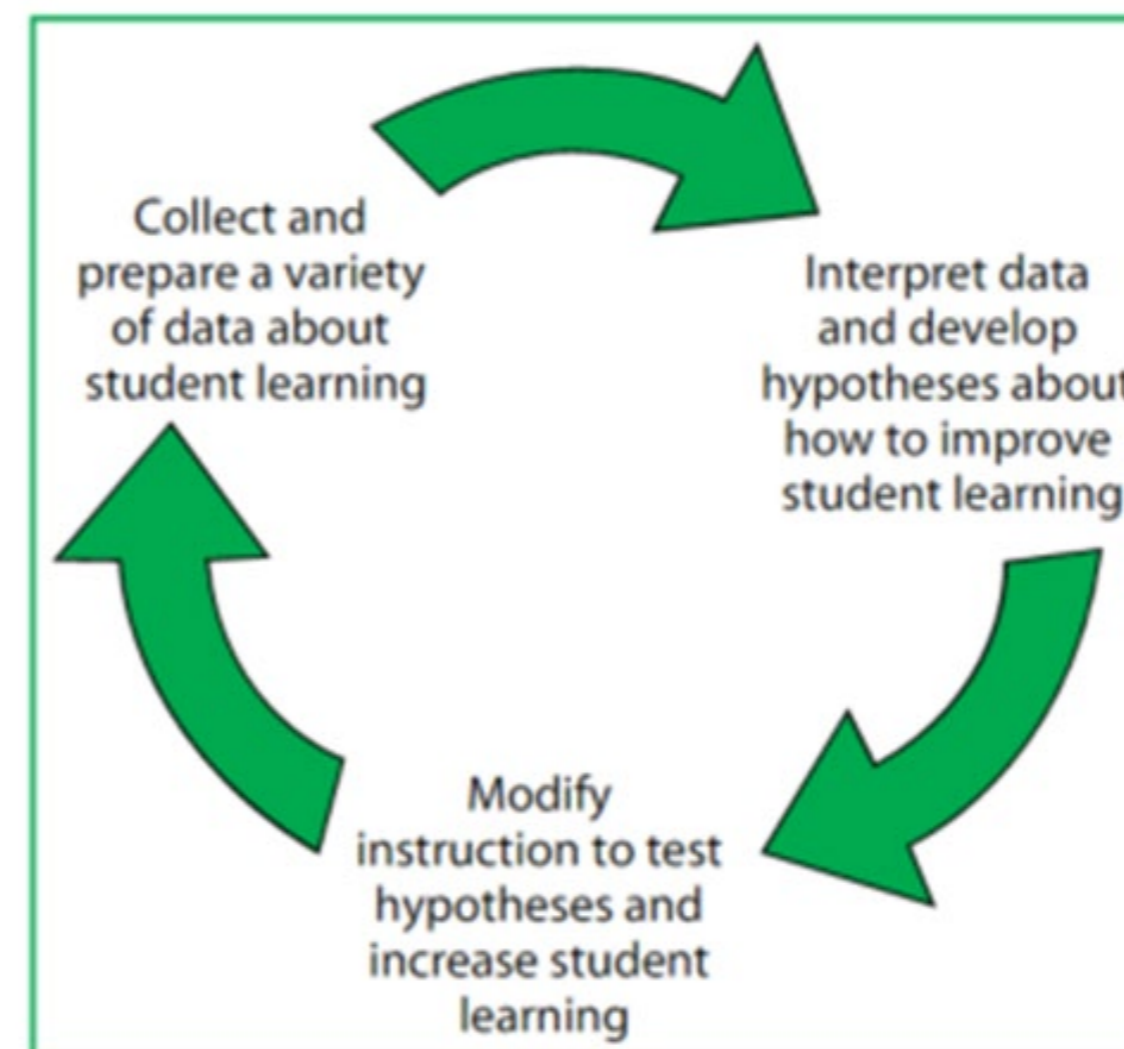
# Instructional improvement cycle toolkit Part 1: Planning guide, Route 1, Step 2

Selecting evidence-based strategies to address challenges/needs

Small group discussion/sharing:

1. Which strategies might be most useful?
2. What barriers might exist in using the strategies to address challenges/needs?

# Strategies for Supporting Adult Education Program Retention

- Starting at intake, orientation, and instruction with student goal setting and matching students to classes and classwork based on their needs

- Teachers establish relationships with students, especially in the first three weeks of participation in the program

- Teachers help students understand the cost-benefit of program participation and persistence

- Students are engaged in discussions of their motivations for being enrolled in the program

- The curriculum and schedules match the needs and interests of the students

- Teachers develop a persistence plan with students that supports students and informs instruction

- Teachers implement evidence-based instructional practices

# Instructional improvement cycle toolkit Part 1: Prior to the next session, complete Worksheet I-1. Strategy selection from the Instructional improvement cycle toolkit

(Cherasaro, Reale, Haystead, & Marzano, 2015)
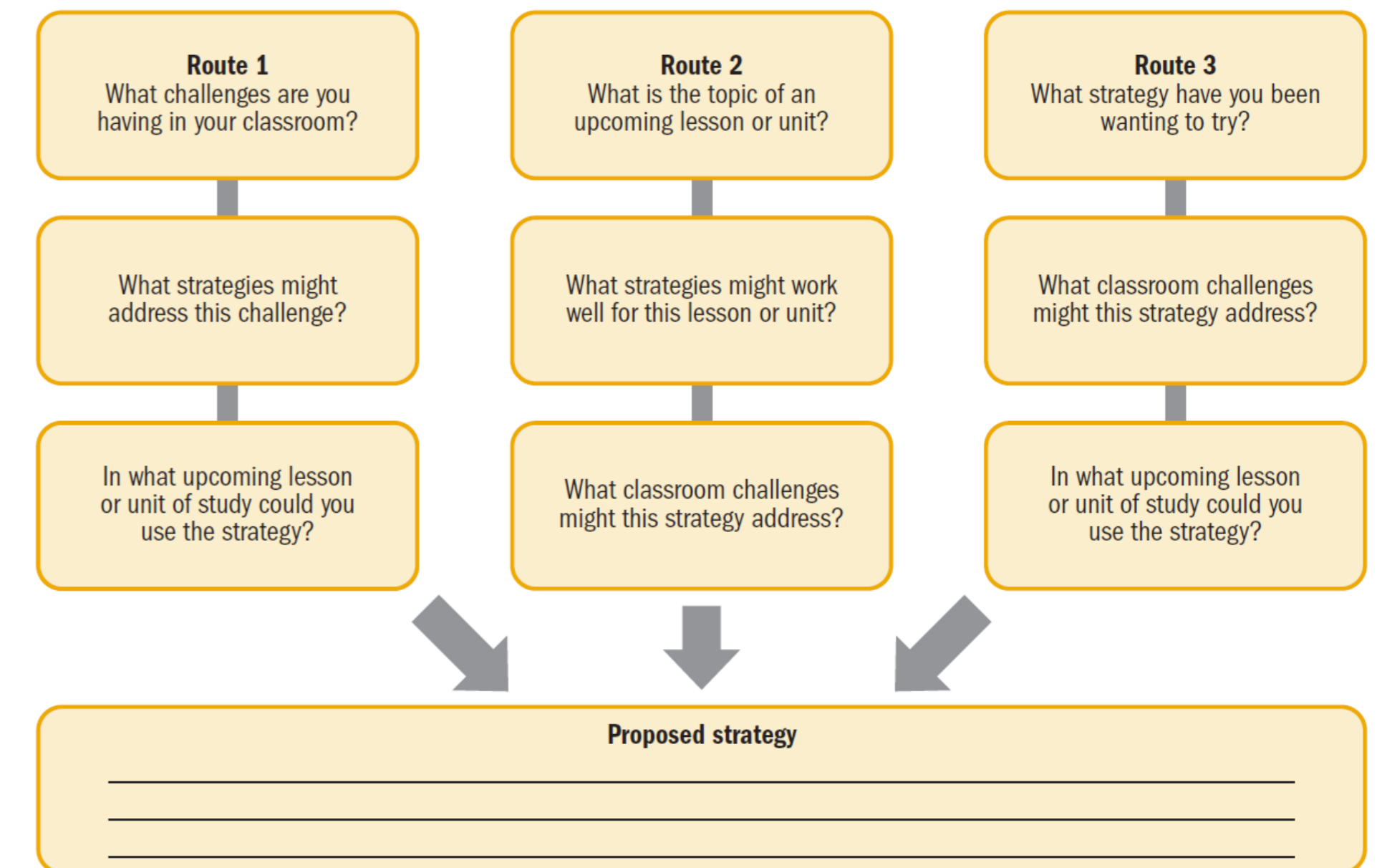
**Source:** Authors' adaptation of the roadmap provided by Jill Johnson, Education Service Unit 6, Milford, Nebraska.

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# Recap of Session Goals

1. Review the current literature on adult education retention

2. Consider and discuss retention strategies in adult education

3. Consider and discuss barriers to increasing retention rates in adult education

4. Select a strategy to implement

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