



# Retention through Redirection

PROTOCOL

March 2002



College Sector Committee  
for Adult Upgrading

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FEATURE # 1: EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNERS AT RISK</b>	
INDICATORS FOR IDENTIFYING LEARNERS AT RISK .....	1
SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS .....	4
A MODEL FOR REDIRECTING LEARNERS.....	5
<b>FEATURE # 2: EFFECTIVE PROCESS FOR HELPING LEARNERS SET REALISTIC CAREER AND EMPLOYMENT GOALS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
LEARNERS' VIEWS.....	7
PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS.....	8
<b>FEATURE # 3: POLICIES THAT ESTABLISH EXPECTATIONS FOR ATTENDANCE, PROGRESS AND CONDUCT.....</b>	<b>13</b>
ATTENDANCE.....	13
ACADEMIC PROGRESS.....	15
CONDUCT OF LEARNERS .....	17
AGREEMENTS/CONTRACTS WITH LEARNERS .....	18
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PROGRAM.....	18
CONDITIONS FOR RE-ENTRY TO LBS PROGRAM .....	19
SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS .....	19
<b>FEATURE # 4: SYSTEMATIC PROCESS FOR REVIEWING LEARNERS' GOALS, PROGRESS AND ATTENDANCE .....</b>	<b>21</b>
EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE REVIEW PROCESSES .....	21
<b>FEATURE # 5: STRATEGIES TO HELP LEARNERS RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE THE FORCES THAT INFLUENCE PERSISTENCE.....</b>	<b>24</b>
FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS .....	24
SELF-EFFICACY .....	28
<b>FEATURE # 6: ACCESS TO PERSONAL, CAREER AND ACADEMIC COUNSELLING.....</b>	<b>1</b>
AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY .....	29
<b>FEATURE # 7: AWARENESS OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REDIRECTION OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR LEARNERS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
OPTIONS FOR REDIRECTION .....	31
CHALLENGES OF REDIRECTION.....	32
CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS.....	33
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>35</b>

## APPENDICES

- Appendix A:** Practitioners' Reasons for Learners' Poor Attendance
- Appendix B:** Practitioners' Reasons for Learners' Lack of Progress
- Appendix C:** Redirection Model
- Appendix D:** Feedback from Restarted Learners
- Appendix E:** Goal-Setting as Part of the Personal Management Course – Connestoga
- Appendix F:** Sample of Attendance Strategy – Niagara College
- Appendix G:** Sample of LBS Program Policy
- Appendix H:** Sample of Three Week Planning Sheet – Cambrian College
- Appendix I:** Description of the Student Advisory System and samples of training plans – Durham College
- Appendix J:** Sample of Blueprints Learning Outcomes Progress Report – Fanshawe College
- Appendix K:** Meeting Target Dates – Cambrian College
- Appendix L:** Sample of Career Report – Canadore College
- Appendix M:** Certificate of Achievement – Canadore College
- Appendix N:** Chart of Examples of Redirection Options
- Appendix O:** Case Studies of Redirected Learners
- Appendix P:** Customized Demonstrations for Redirected Learner – Cambrian College

# Feature # 1

An effective means  
for identifying  
learners at risk

For the purposes of this study, the term 'at-risk' applies to LBS college learners who are struggling with serious personal or program problems, and as a result may have to leave the program before achieving their goals. Early detection of at-risk learners is an essential component of any retention strategy, but the critical first step of the Redirection Protocol.

Learners can and do leave at various stages of the program. Redirection, likewise, can be initiated at any stage. We therefore need to anticipate the obstacles learners may encounter both in the program and in their personal lives. In this feature we will look at how programs identify learners at risk. We will also introduce a model that shows when learners are most likely to be at risk.

## Indicators for Identifying Learners At Risk

Most programs and practitioners use indicators to identify learners with serious problems. Initial focus groups with LBS college intake staff and practitioners revealed that 3 key indicators are used to identify learners at risk. It was also clear from the LBS program policies we reviewed, that these same indicators are closely linked to learner success, and conversely, failure.

The key indicators are:

- poor attendance
- lack of progress
- inappropriate classroom behaviour

We wanted to find out what those behaviours looked like and explore the underlying causes of poor attendance and poor progress. The following feedback is based on questionnaires completed by over 40 LBS college practitioners.

### Inappropriate classroom behaviours

Practitioners were asked to list other kinds of indicators, besides poor attendance and lack of progress, that showed a learner might be at risk. Not surprisingly, most focused

on learners' behaviours and how those behaviours played out in the classroom setting. Inappropriate behaviour can be a powerful indicator that the learner is at risk.

Examples of inappropriate behaviours included:

- reluctance to ask questions, to ask for help or to show how answers are obtained
- inconsistent performance patterns
- inappropriate social behaviours (withdrawal, attention-seeking)
- classroom disruption
- inappropriate requests for time and help
- lateness
- negative comments from learners about their progress
- inability to focus for periods of time
- change in attitude, behaviour, participation
- overemphasizes "I really want this course," or "I'm going to make a go of it this time."
- overreacts when provided with suggestions or corrections
- asks, "Why do I need this? I already know this."
- doesn't want to connect with the teacher

Several practitioners offered explanations for these behaviours. They include: lack of realistic goal, illness, chronic pain, learning disabilities, negative influence of a new peer group, exhaustion, poor short-term memory, despair about how long the whole process will take and frustration with the course.

### **Practitioners' reasons for learners' poor attendance**

Practitioners were asked to comment on the main reasons for learners' poor attendance. Their comments fell into two main categories which are presented in the chart on the following page. Single responses are not included in the chart. See **Appendix A** for the complete list.

<b>Practitioners' Reasons for Learners' Poor Attendance</b>	
<b>Reasons related to situational variables</b>	<b>Reasons related to psychosocial variables</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family demands, no babysitter, sick child (27)</li> <li>• personal health, psychological and physical (16)</li> <li>• work, learners get exhausted and fall behind (10)</li> <li>• financial resources (10)</li> <li>• problems with transportation, long bus rides, no public transit, unreliable car (6)</li> <li>• addictions (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of self-esteem, fear of failure (10)</li> <li>• lack of motivation, determination or desire (10)</li> <li>• lack of commitment to program (8)</li> <li>• lack of clear goals (6)</li> <li>• lack of progress (5)</li> <li>• lack of self-discipline (4)</li> <li>• lack of support at home (3)</li> </ul>

### **Practitioners' reasons for learners' lack of progress**

Practitioners were also asked to comment on the main reasons for learners' lack of progress. Their comments, for the most part, were related to psychosocial variables, although a number of program variables were mentioned. Two of these were an inappropriate curriculum and an inappropriate teaching style used in the classroom.

Single and double responses are not included in the list. See **Appendix B** for the complete list.

- irregular or poor attendance (14)
- learning disabilities (12)
- lack of motivation (10)
- lack of skills and strategies – time management skills, self-management, conceptual, coping, learning to learn (7)
- lack of cognitive ability – learner may be in a level where the content is too difficult (7)
- lack of clearly defined goals (6)
- too many outside pressures and personal problems, especially financial (5)
- lack of commitment (4)

- lack of effort or study (4)
- low self-esteem (3)

### **Learners' reasons for poor attendance and lack of progress**

Learners were also asked to comment on what made it difficult for them to attend and make progress in their programs. Their two main barriers to good attendance, like those the practitioners cited, were (1) family responsibilities, and (2) health concerns. The two main negative influences on their rate of progress were (1) problems with the course, and (2) health concerns. Problems with the course included difficulty understanding and learning the material, subjects that were not interesting or up to date, and insufficient time to finish the work. Learners were asked how much they thought their attendance affected their rate of progress. Only 60% (36 out of 60) said attendance affected their progress 'a lot'. 24 learners felt that it affected their progress 'somewhat,' while 4 felt it didn't affect their progress 'very much'. Learners were also asked to describe their attendance as 'very good', 'good' or 'not very good'. There was a strong correlation between their attendance and how they saw attendance affecting their progress. For example, 23 learners reporting very good attendance felt that attendance affected their rate of progress 'a lot'. 24 learners with good attendance felt that attendance affected their rate of progress 'somewhat'. While this finding is not conclusive, it indicates a need for programs to explore learners' attitudes about attendance more carefully.

Learners' perspectives on attendance and progress are further discussed in Feature # 5 of the Protocol.

### **Summary Highlights**

The three key indicators practitioners use to show that a learner is at risk appear to be reliable ones. Attendance and progress are both concrete and measurable. Practitioners and learners cited mainly situational reasons for learners' poor attendance such as family responsibilities, personal health, work responsibilities and problems with transportation. These observations were generally confirmed by other studies:

*Family concerns constitute the majority of reasons why adults must give up their educational goals. Child care problems, a lack of transportation, or financial problems are the major reasons adults surveyed gave for leaving educational programs before completion. (West Virginia Adult Education Association, p. 6)*

Practitioners felt that poor attendance was primarily responsible for learners' lack of progress while learners reported problems with the course itself. Although this finding is not conclusive, it is very interesting. Retention efforts that focus on attendance will be ineffective if the real reasons for learners' poor attendance are related to the program itself. Programs might benefit from a more thorough exploration of practitioners' and learners' perceptions of progress – what encourages it and what inhibits it.

Behaviour is a very powerful, but perhaps less reliable indicator. Not every learner who is having difficulties with attendance and progress will react the same way. Some will persist in spite of their difficulties and some will leave. While indicators can generally alert us that learners may be at risk, they do little to tell us who will persist and achieve their goals and who won't.

## A Model for Redirecting Learners

Learner persistence is a highly complicated issue and studies show that non-completion has numerous complex causes. Kerka (1995) suggests that it not enough to think about learners as simply completers or non-completers. She also suggests that it is misleading to consider program leavers as a homogeneous group.

Several studies, in fact, have attempted to explain the complexities of completion/non-completion by developing categories or types of learners. A guidebook developed by the West Virginia Adult Basic Education describes the following five types of learners that are often found in adult basic education programs:

- **Completers** – students who have achieved their purpose for attending class and have moved on to new goals
- **Persisters** – students who are currently enrolled and attending frequently
- **Pretenders** – students who are currently enrolled but not attending regularly
- **Withdrawers** – students who have left the program for a reason beyond the program's control
- **Dropouts** – students who have left for minor reasons

Although we found these models very helpful, they did not quite capture the movement of learners into and out of a typical LBS college program. Nor did they tell us when a learner might be at risk. Some adults, for example, are redirected before they even begin the program; they may be asked to postpone their goals to take care of more pressing personal needs. Support staff at one college reported that they often knew from their

very first meeting with a learner whether or not that learner would 'make it'. Many learners either had severe financial problems or lacked the basic budgeting skills to budget for their book deposit. Other learners had difficulty getting organized for school, e.g., they were not able to provide the necessary documentation to register. Still others had very little in the way of a support system. Learners, who needed to postpone their education, were usually encouraged to return when their situations stabilized.

Many learners leave within the first 3 or 4 weeks of their program and usually without notice. In one sense they are redirecting themselves. The program needs to focus its retention efforts on this group. Seidman (1996) concludes that early identification and intensive intervention make a difference in whether learners leave the program prematurely.

The *What Works* project provided three strategies for programs to use. They were:

1. Learning Alert: a learning disabilities quickscreen
2. Learners Helping Learners: a strategy for setting up focus groups for learners
3. Screening for Success: a Self-Management/Self-Direction quickscreen

Learners who make it beyond this critical period of time will likely encounter other obstacles. Some will manage to cope with these difficulties and maintain good attendance, but others will not. Some will manage to make progress even if they do not attend regularly, but others will not. Learners can and do leave the program at any time. Some learners leave even when they are doing well. Some learners will inform program faculty that they are planning to withdraw, but others will not.

We attempted to create a visual model that not only represented these variables, but also simplified them to show where retention and redirection efforts could be most effectively applied. See **Appendix C** for the Redirection Model.

The model was reviewed by a number of practitioners as part of the consultation process and adjusted accordingly. As you can see from the model, redirection needs to be considered at various stages of the program.



Study the Redirection Model. Does it help you see at what points in the program the learner might be at risk, and where interventions might be required? How do you think you might use this model?

# Feature # 2

**An effective process  
for helping learners set  
realistic career and  
employment goals**

In the previous feature, we looked at how key indicators were used to identify learners who might be at risk of leaving the program or of failing. We also introduced a visual model that would help practitioners anticipate where learners might run into problems and where intervention efforts might be required. The purpose of the intervention, in whatever form it takes by whatever process is in place, is to discover the obstacles that are getting in the way of learners' goals. To do this successfully, various situational, psychosocial and program variables must be considered. Ultimately, however, it needs to be determined if learners are capable of achieving their goals. While the challenge might be how to initiate redirection, the dilemma is when to initiate it. Should programs be redirecting learners sooner? Would this help learners persist in their learning? In this feature we explore questions like these based on information about goals and goal-setting gathered from learners and practitioners.

## Learners' Views

We had an opportunity to survey two groups of learners who had left and restarted the program, i.e., persistent learners. Of the 15 learners who were interviewed, 4 reported that they did not have a clear goal for themselves while they were in the program. Two of these learners had been in the program for more than 6 months. Of those who had set a clear goal, 4 did not feel it was achievable by the time they had left the program. In spite of this only 3 of the 15 felt they had not been making good progress. Most left the program for personal reasons – family and financial. See **Appendix D** for the complete feedback.



Programs know how difficult it is to follow up on learners who have left the program, but they do know that many return. This is an interesting group to study. What kinds of information do you or could you be getting from this group? How can you use that information in goal-setting?

We also asked learners who were currently attending the program how they felt about achieving their goals. 60% of learners surveyed (36 out of 60) felt very positive about achieving their goals, 35% (21 out of 60) felt positive and 5 % or 3 learners did not feel

positive at all. We had hoped to correlate these findings with learners' length of time in the program, but our sample did not permit this. Most of the learners who were surveyed had been in the program for only two or three months.

## **Practitioners' Views**

We also asked practitioners if learners stay with unrealistic goals for too long. Several reported that if this were the case, the program was responsible for letting it happen, "For a learner to stick with an unrealistic goal is a reflection of the relationship between faculty and learners. For this to happen implies a dysfunction in the delivery of the program." Other practitioners (20 out of the 30 who responded to this question) felt that learners did stay with unrealistic goals too long, but that there were a number of reasons for this. Perhaps the most important one is that it takes time for learners to find out about their own abilities, "Sometimes what seems like 'too long' is the necessary time for the student to give up a goal and accept a more realistic but less attractive one." Nor is this an easy process, "Students are often very reluctant to admit their lack of ability – afraid to damage self-esteem and lose face with peers." Another practitioner reported that learners also need time to realize the outside factors that demand their attention. In some cases learners stay with unrealistic goals because of pressure from their sponsors, or because there isn't anything appropriate to change them to, i.e. no other educational or employment opportunities.

Some learners, it seems, are under pressure to stay with their goals from their own parents who want to see them move on to post secondary. Considering that 36% of LBS learners in colleges in 2000/2001 were 24 years old or younger, parental pressure is an important factor to consider in helping younger learners set goals. Practitioners also commented that helping LBS Level 3 learners set realistic goals was particularly challenging. Last year this group represented 34% of the provincial LBS college program enrolment.

Although practitioners felt it was their role to help learners achieve their goals, many expressed a reluctance to act when learners' goals no longer seemed achievable, "We need to be realistic with these students. For the most part this has not been the case. I don't think we are doing anyone any favours by allowing them to think things are possible that are not." Others were concerned about further discouraging the learners, "It is difficult to be too harsh with some learners."

One practitioner noted that learners themselves often do not want to change their goals:

*Most students who attend a college-based program have their eyes set on attending a post secondary program when they complete the upgrading. It is only after the students have been in the program for some time that we get a clear picture of whether their goals are realistic ones or not. It is difficult to steer someone away from the college if they have their mind set on the fact that college is the right place for them.*

This observation was partly supported by learners who were asked how willing they were to change their goals and the focus of their program. 6 out of 60 learners said they were 'not willing' to change their goals. Another 23 said they were 'somewhat willing'.

### **Short-term and long-term goals**

One comment, in particular, highlighted an important distinction about goals:

*It depends on the goal. If it is a career goal, then perhaps some students stay with an unrealistic goal too long. But if it is providing motivation, then it doesn't hurt for a time. With regular evaluation of progress, the student can't help see over time that the goal is beyond his/her abilities in terms of financial resources, time commitment, or marks requirements. Teachers and advisors can help redirect the student to pursue other interests while the student is holding on to his unrealistic goal.*

Both long-term and short-term goals are important to the learner and it is critical that programs understand the differences between them.

The **long-term goal** is what the learner eventually wants to be able to do. Statistics show that most adults choose the LBS college program for further education or training, i.e., post secondary or trades. We also know that many learners leave the program before achieving those goals and are not considered successful. Long-term goals are, nevertheless, important to establish for two main reasons: they help shape the kinds of learning activities the learner engages in and they provide an important source of motivation for the learner.

The **short-term goal** is what the learner can achieve within a shorter time frame. This time frame is usually the amount of time the learner is able to commit to the program. Statistics show us that most LBS students are prepared to commit six months. Consider

a learner who needs to improve his/her communications skills to get a job or to perform better at his/her job. It is quite possible that the learner can achieve his/her short-term goal within a six-month time frame. Likewise, it is possible for a learner whose goal is post secondary to achieve his/her short-term within the same time frame. Here, the short term-goal represents one step towards his/her long-term goal.

Short-term goals offer a different way of looking at goal completion which is attractive to both the learner who can leave the program with a sense of accomplishment, and the program which can record the short-term goal achievement as a success.

Consider the following scenario:

### **John's Story**

John's long-term goal is to get in to a business program at the college. He has been in the program for 4 months and is doing well. He is nearly finished level 4 communications and math. His personal circumstances, however, make it necessary for him to leave the program. He needs to start looking for work. He requests a reduced schedule, so he can spend his afternoons job searching. John plans to return to the program as soon as he can.

Unfortunately, we do not know if John will return to the program. If John's success is measured by his long-term goal completion, he cannot be counted as a statistical success if he leaves the program 4 or 5 weeks later. He did not achieve his long-term goal of getting into the business program. Nor will John likely consider himself a success. If, on the other hand, a short-term goal such as completing his level 4 subjects had been established for John, he might be able to achieve this goal before he gets a job and leaves the program. If John gets a job right away, perhaps he can be encouraged to attend evening classes to complete his level 4 subjects.

Another possibility exists. A new short-term goal could be set – one that helps John prepare for employment. Either way, the focus on the short-term goal benefits both John and the program. If John feels successful, he may be more motivated to return to the program and work towards his long-term goals.

At this time there appears to be little consistency in the way LBS college programs are defining goals. This is an issue that clearly needs to be studied further.

Some programs identified specific needs to help learners set realistic, achievable goals:

- workshops that guide the student through goal investigation
- a mechanism for reassessing goals
- counselling available to assist with goal-setting

### **Effective goal-setting approaches**

Other programs felt they were doing this well. What seems to work is a strong focus on initial goal-setting and a systematic process for follow-up.

Comments are summarized below:

- Learners participate in a goal-setting and career search program before beginning literacy and numeracy or at least in the first weeks of literacy and numeracy. Most seem to develop workable goals as a result of exercises they go through.
- The Employment Training Readiness program and the Focus program enable students to set realistic goals as well as develop skills to assist them in getting their personal lives in order so that when they enter academic upgrading they are prepared for the work ahead of them.
- Alternatives need to be presented early in their programs via portfolio development, essential skills, bridges and mentors.
- Learners may begin with unrealistic goals. However, if a program demands progress, meeting of outcomes and regular attendance, goals are quickly modified to become more realistic.
- If reviews of their training plans occur on a regular basis and a discussion of practical options and alternatives happens, goal-setting doesn't prove to be a significant problem for the majority of students.
- This can be done in incremental stages such as in student advising that looks at the rate of progress as compared to the average speed that other students complete material. Looking at what is involved in managing a post secondary is also a good eye-opener.

See **Appendix E** for a brief description of how goal-setting is delivered at one college.



How are short-term and long-term goals defined in your program? How does your program determine goal-completion or learner success for reporting purposes?



The OLC publication, *Designing Down, Assessing Up*, is an excellent resource that explores a number of areas related to goal-setting. Areas include what kinds of goal-setting information need to be recorded on training plans and how goals can be analyzed to identify the tasks and skills the learner must perform to be successful. Check to see if your program has a copy.



Log on to the following web site to read Sue Barton's study of teachers' approaches and practices with goal-setting in New River Valley, Virginia. The study explores various frustrations, challenges and successes related to goal-setting. You may find your experiences mirrored in their stories.

<http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb/Barton.pdf>

# Feature # 3

**Policies that establish expectations for attendance, progress and conduct**

Program policies outline what the program expects from the learner and what the learner can expect from the program. They are important because they ensure systematic application of various program practices. We reviewed LBS program policies (procedures, handbooks and guidelines) from nine colleges to see how attendance, progress and conduct were addressed. We also asked practitioners about specific retention supports or strategies that might uphold their policies.

## Attendance

The policies submitted for review show that attendance is the key concern. It is closely linked with learner progress and goal achievement. The policies are also realistic. They recognize that adult learners are subject to overwhelming personal and family demands that will affect their attendance. The roles and responsibilities of learners are clearly laid out in college policies although they differ somewhat in number and detail, e.g., targets for attendance.

Roles and responsibilities include:

- understanding the definition of 'excuse' absences – illness, doctor's appointments, court appearances, jury duty or bereavement leave (some colleges include child's illness, school holidays, appointments with sponsors, but others do not)
- attendance of classes according to agreed upon schedule
- understanding of attendance targets – 80% or 90 % of classes or a specified number of days a month
- informing the office or designated person in advance of any anticipated absences by the end of the day of the excused absence
- providing appropriate documents for time missed – attendance slips and medical notes

- recording attendance – learners must accurately fill out attendance cards (in other situations, staff record daily attendance and turn it into the office at the end of the week)
- getting caught up for missed classes – updating notes, collecting materials and completing assignments

Several practitioners reported that structured approaches to attendance encouraged attendance. Practitioners from 9 colleges specifically mentioned the effectiveness of attendance policies, “Learners are aware of the consequences for not attending, i.e., they can be put on probation and eventually be withdrawn from the program.” One college reported that attendance has improved since it has been tracked more closely. Two respondents, on the other hand, felt that their college attendance policies were punitive, specifically the policy of withdrawing learners after 3 days of unexcused absence from the program. Another noted, “We don’t want to pressure learners too much and send them away too quickly because some students need a long time to build confidence and begin to work – even up to a year. Then they take off and succeed.”

### **Effective strategies and approaches for improving attendance**

Several specific strategies for improving attendance were mentioned, but practitioners were less certain how effective they were. Four practitioners reported that they try to contact learners by telephone. One team member, for example, is assigned to accept phone-ins and follow up with learners who have been absent. It was noted though that by the time learners have to be called, they are usually ‘lost’. A second strategy involved flexible schedules that accommodated learners who wanted to or needed to attend full time. They might have the option of choosing between 4 days at 6.5 hours a day, or 5 days at 5 hours a day. A third innovative strategy allows learners to make up for time missed. If a learner has to be away for a day, s/he can attend hours outside of his/her regular schedule in order to maintain perfect attendance. The advantage of this is that learners can attend up to 125% of their classes on a monthly basis. This is a great incentive for motivated learners who want to fast track their learning.

One interesting approach, which involved setting dates for completion of work, emphasizes work rather than attendance. This approach warrants a closer look. While no practitioner would ever deny the importance of regular attendance, several did admit that much of the current emphasis on attendance is because program funding is currently tied to student contact hours. The result is greater pressure on faculty and students to improve attendance. While some programs feel that enforcing their policies

will improve attendance, others feel it could jeopardize their funding. One noted, “If we had a waiting list, we could be much firmer with problem students, but as it stands we don’t want to lose the students we have. We have no one to fill the seats.”

One practitioner discovered a creative way to use the current funding structure to her advantage by making attendance a class issue, e.g., discussing attendance as a class, letting learners know that attendance is directly related to funding and allowing them to set standards. See **Appendix F** for a description of this innovative approach.

Other attendance strategies included:

- providing ‘readiness’ components such as orientation or employment readiness programs before learners begin their academic upgrading
- holding bi-weekly staff meetings to discuss individual cases
- offering prompt personal counselling on site to discover reasons for absenteeism
- monitoring contract monthly, bi-monthly or even weekly with counsellor
- permitting casual attendance for 4 weeks of the program and then demanding 90% attendance of scheduled classes
- creating a new position of Academic Coach whose responsibility it is to find solutions to learners’ problems and to provide the necessary supports
- talking to learners who are missing a lot of time (sometimes the solution is a leave until they deal with the situation)

## **Academic Progress**

Only two of the policies dealt with progress as a separate category. One described why it was important for learners to make measurable progress towards their post secondary goals. It identified reasons why learners often fail to make progress, e.g., problems with time-management or unrealistic goals. Issues related to program progress in other college policies appear to be embedded in agreements/contracts with the learner or processes such as training plan development.

The two policies that dealt explicitly with progress outlined the following expectations and conditions for learners:

- that learners are expected to progress according to time lines/target dates
- that learners must consult with faculty to determine the necessary rate of progress to meet goals stated in the training plan
- that learners who are falling behind contact the program advisor

- that learners making no progress for 1 month will be referred to the program advisor to reconsider their goals and develop a plan of action
- that learners making no progress for a second month will be required to sign a progress agreement
- that learners who do not fulfill the terms of the progress agreement will be withdrawn at the end of the semester

One policy specified the maximum amount of time that LBS sponsored learners were allowed to participate in the program.

The expectations for progress in the LBS college program are very much influenced by the anticipated demands at the post secondary level where the learner will have to contend with heavy program content and strict deadlines. While policies clearly emphasize the importance of learner progress, practitioners recognize the special conditions that make it hard to define what realistic progress actually is. What is realistic for one learner in LBS Level 5, for example, may not be realistic for another. What constitutes reasonable progress for a learner whose goal is academic may not be realistic for a learner whose goal is employment. Practitioners themselves do not always see learners' abilities and efforts to learn in quite the same way, "Teachers have different tolerances for target dates and keeping learners on track. This contributes to a general lack of consistency."

### **Length of time to complete a level**

Practitioners were asked to speculate on the amount of time it should take a learner to complete one LBS level. Practitioners provided a wide range of responses – anywhere from 1 month to no limit for one level of communications. Most responses (11 out of 17) were in the 4 to 8 month range. The responses for math were similar. 9 out of 19 practitioners felt that it should take 4 to 8 months to complete one level of math.

Many practitioners were clearly uncomfortable answering this question. Some questioned why it needed to be answered at all. Others felt there were just too many factors that needed to be considered. One such factor was the entry level of the learner. Practitioners felt that a learner who begins at a lower level needs more time for completing it.

## **Length of stay in programs**

Most practitioners felt strongly that the learners should stay in programs as long as they are making progress. It was acknowledged that some learners do plateau in spite of interventions and supports. One practitioner noted that plateauing should be evident within 8 to 20 months. Another remarked:

*It takes students a while to see that they have reached a maximum, but with guidance and support, some people can usually be redirected with some sense of accomplishment. This redirecting is not always without difficulty and resentment, however.*

Another factor that impacts on length of stay is the delivery model, e.g., individualized versus group. Sometimes colleges themselves put 'roadblocks' in the way of learners. Post secondary programs, for example, have raised the eligibility requirements resulting in fewer options for learners. Outside influences too must be considered. How long a learner remains in a program must take into account the local labour market situation and the overall state of the economy, "There's no sense pushing people through the system, say for employment, if there are no jobs to go to."

Learners raised many of the same concerns. While most (42 out of 60) agreed that they should be given a time limit to complete their programs, they also felt certain factors needed to be considered, e.g., type of learning style, the age of the learner and workload. One learner commented, "Each person learns at different levels. Do not push people to understand. They are already here to help themselves."

## **Conduct of Learners**

Policies stress that learners have the right to an environment free of discrimination and harassment according to the Human Rights Code. Learners are generally expected to behave in a professional manner befitting their goal of post secondary or employment. The policies specifically ask learners to:

- become familiar with and abide by college policies, e.g., during orientation, through handbooks
- identify any necessary accommodations, such as technologies for learning disabilities
- conduct themselves in a manner that advances their academic progress, e.g., using classroom time appropriately

- show respect for others and avoid disruptive behaviour that interferes with the learning of others, e.g., talking too loud, using vulgar language, bringing children to class, bringing food or beverages into the classroom, or using walkmans or cell phones.

Punctuality was also stressed, usually in connection with attendance. Late arrivals were seen as very disruptive to other learners and to the teacher. Learners, as well, mentioned they were affected by the behaviour of their classmates, particularly by 'loud' people and students with negative attitudes. Habitual lateness is considered a very serious problem and in one policy at least, was said to be grounds for withdrawing learners. In some circumstances instructors may refuse to admit learners into class when they are late. Learners, who anticipate being late, are expected to notify the office/teacher.

## **Agreements/Contracts with Learners**

Learners' responsibilities at several colleges are formalized through various kinds of processes and contracts. Some of these include:

- declarations signed during orientation by learners to demonstrate they understand their responsibilities for attendance and conduct
- probationary contracts outlining the learners' responsibilities for attendance, punctuality, absences and progress according to their program schedule
- student alert process whereby learners are put on alert if their attendance, academic progress, or conduct puts them or other learners at risk. Learners are issued a form and together with the counsellor or teacher formulate an appropriate action plan. Learners who do not follow the plan, meet with the dean.

## **Withdrawal from the Program**

Most of the grounds for withdrawing learners from the program are for poor attendance, lack of progress or inappropriate conduct. A learner, for example, may be withdrawn for the following reasons:

- not meeting attendance targets, e.g., 80% of classes in a 4 week period, 1.5 days per month for full time learners
- not reporting absences exceeding 3 or more days in a 16 week period
- not being punctual on a repeated basis
- not making satisfactory progress

## Conditions for Re-entry to LBS Program

Policies also listed the conditions for re-entry to the LBS Program. These conditions vary considerably. Examples are listed below:

- Re-entry is allowed upon the review of the dean.
- Learners who are exited because of attendance must remain out of the program for a minimum of one month. Before they are re-admitted, they must document the reasons they think they should be readmitted.
- Learners who are out of the program for less than 6 months must meet with the advisor to determine placement. Learners who are out of the program for more than 6 months must take goal orientation for re-testing and placement.
- After the first withdrawal, the learner must wait for a period of 3 months to re-enter program, after the second, 6 months, and after the third, 12 months.
- Learners who are withdrawn by the college cannot reapply for 12 months.

## Summary Highlights

Policies on attendance, progress and conduct appear to play an important role in supporting retention efforts in college LBS programs. While they vary in detail and structure, most focus on the importance of good attendance. They establish the expectations for attendance and the consequences for learners who fail to meet those expectations. At the same time, the policies reflect an understanding that full or perfect attendance will be challenging for many LBS learners. Provisions are made for learners who for good reasons will miss class. Flexible scheduling (full and part-time) is available to accommodate the numerous demands and stresses on adult learners such as employment, young children, expectations of sponsors, financial concerns and health problems. A leave of absence is granted to learners who must 'stop out' of the program for family or medical emergencies. In most cases, though, there are stipulations or conditions for getting a leave of absence such as tying the leave to attendance and progress.

There are differences in the way colleges use policies. Some colleges are fairly aggressive in enforcing their policies in the belief that learners will take the program more seriously. One college reported that the reputation of the program actually improved when the policies were enforced. In other colleges the policies are simply "something to fall back on when all other interventions have failed and all avenues have been exhausted."

## Guidelines for developing policies

Based on our review of existing LBS program policies and feedback from questionnaires and consultations, we have developed a list of key criteria that we felt programs could use to evaluate their current policies. The criteria are listed in the chart below.

We also developed a sample policy that addresses attendance, progress and conduct so you could try out the criteria. See **Appendix G**.



Use the criteria in the chart below to evaluate the sample policy. How does it measure up? Now try applying the criteria to your own program policy.

<b>Sample policy</b>	<b>not present</b>	<b>somewhat present</b>	<b>present</b>	<b>clearly present</b>
• is accessible to learners, e.g., written in plain language				
• is firm but fair, e.g., the learner is asked to withdraw after all reasonable interventions have been tried				
• focuses on the learners' commitment and responsibility to the program				
• defines the expectations and requirements for the learners in clear terms				
• outlines the roles and responsibilities of the faculty in helping the learner persist and be successful				
• encourages re-entry while identifying stipulations				



How do you currently introduce program policies to your learners? Can you think of interesting or interactive ways to engage learners in recognizing the importance of policies? For example, could you build learning activities or reflection pieces around them?

# Feature # 4

**A systematic process  
for reviewing learners'  
goals, progress,  
attendance and barriers**

Although many LBS college programs have effective courses and processes in place to help learners set achievable goals, many learners will change and continue to change their goals:

*Goal-setting is a developmental process. With more information and confidence, students frequently change their goals. It is important to revisit their goals as well as the progress toward meeting them. (Precure p. 9)*

The key to effective redirection is helping learners discover if their goals are still relevant and achievable. The challenge is to discover this in time. There are many factors that influence learners' goals: their cognitive ability, the length of time they are prepared to commit to the program, outside influences such as the economy and their own personal circumstances. These factors need to be explored with learners on a systematic basis.

## **Examples of Effective Review Processes**

We asked practitioners if they had developed an effective way to help learners review their goals. Of the 35 who responded, 23 affirmed they had. Five more said they had, but only partly, while 7 said they had not. Examples of successful ways included specific programs such as Employment Training Readiness or Essential Skills Training that focus on intensive goal-setting. Another example involved integrating the goals review process into classroom work and demonstrations such as reports and assignments to update short and long-term goals. Most examples, however, involved a regular review process that looked at learners' progress. Some of these took the form of regularly scheduled meetings with individual learners. Other reviews were conducted in class. The review process was usually conducted by the practitioner.

The importance of keeping good records was considered critical. Various forms are used in the review process to gather and record information from learners.

Practitioners submitted examples of the processes and forms they used and found effective.

See **Appendix H** for a sample of the Three Week Planning Sheet used at Cambrian College with new learners attending their first training plan session.

See **Appendix I** for a description of the Student Advisory System at Durham College. Samples of training plans used to gather and record information are also included. Different versions are provided so that learners can respond to a variety of issues related to progress.

See **Appendix J** for a sample of the Blueprints Learning Outcomes Progress Report used at Fanshawe College. It features a simple way to document learners' progress and includes an action plan for learners.

See **Appendix K** for a form used at Cambrian College that encourages learners to reflect on the importance of meeting their target dates.



How well does your process for reviewing learners' goals, progress, attendance and barriers work? Use the checklist below to see what's working and what could be working better.

## Checklist

Characteristics of an effective review process:

- Review is systematic, i.e., meetings with the learner are scheduled on a regular basis.
- Learners are active participants.
- Several factors are explored, e.g., the learners' goals (short and long-term), program progress, attendance and conduct.
- Learner reflection is encouraged, e.g., helping the learner explore the root causes of poor attendance or lack of progress.
- Effective use of monitoring forms and training plans is made.
- Sessions are streamlined so the process does not consume too much time.
- Creative approaches are used to avoid a repetitive process.
- An action plan for the learner is developed based on the outcome of the interview, e.g., information gathering, career research.
- Good records are kept and distributed to appropriate persons.

Practitioners also look for indicators that they identify as “out of sync with the learner’s goal, and ask the learner to rethink the goal or make changes.” One practitioner remarked, “Occasionally learners need to write the college entrance test and have the score presented to them before reality sets in.” In another program learners at the higher levels are required to complete a career report which involves ‘shadowing’ the post secondary program, e.g., interviewing post secondary teachers and learners. For some learners the ‘shadowing’ portion in level 4 is arranged if it is felt that they require goals clarification. See **Appendix L** for a sample of the Career Report used at Canadore College.

### **Frequency of goal review**

Most practitioners felt goals should be reviewed on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. One practitioner distinguished between kinds of goals. Small goals should be reviewed every two weeks, whereas big goals like program choice should be reviewed every 3 months. Another noted that progress takes longer at the lower level and more time therefore is needed to measure progress. A third suggested that goal-setting was an individualized process to be undertaken when the practitioner feels it is necessary or when the learner indicates a need to do so.

# Feature # 5

**Strategies to help learners recognize and manage the forces that influence persistence**

In this feature we take a closer look at two of the supports to learner persistence that the NSCALL study explored to see how they link to the Self-Management and Self-Direction learning outcome, Become a Self-Directed Learner. The first support is awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help or hinder persistence. These forces are constantly acting on and influencing learners – from the time they begin the program until the time they leave. It is the job of the program to help learners strengthen the positive forces and lessen the negative ones.

## **Force Field Analysis**

We used the idea of the force field analysis to explore in a general way how learners thought about positive and negative forces. Specifically we wanted to know how these forces moved learners towards their goals and how they led them away. Because of various constraints, we chose to use a written questionnaire rather than a personal interview format. In keeping with this format, we asked learners about the positive and negative influences on their attendance and progress. This was familiar territory and we hoped this direct approach would elicit a greater number of responses. Sixty learners, classified as current attenders or learners who had been in the program for at least a month, completed the questionnaire. Most were in Level 4 Communications and needed very little direction or assistance with the questionnaire. Only one learner did not complete the questions related to attendance and progress. Judging from the overall response, the variety of responses and the time it took to complete the questionnaire, it is probable that most learners at this level would have little difficulty identifying the forces that enhance or inhibit their success. Learning to manage them of course is a much greater challenge.

## Negative Influences on Learners' Attendance and Rate of Progress

The negative influences on learners' attendance and progress were strikingly similar and for that reason are presented in a single chart below:

Attendance	Progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>condition of health, constant pain, sitting is painful (8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>state of health, pain due to injury, illnesses, walking is painful (6)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>family responsibilities, sick children, problems with childcare (9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>family responsibilities such as chores and appointments, family emergencies, problems, too many distractions at home (4)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>frustrations with the course – not getting the help when I need it and not keeping up with the work, subjects not interesting (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>problems with the course – hard to understand, hard time learning, not catching onto the work right away, subject material, not enough time to finish course, subjects not interesting or up to date (7)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working full time, part time (5)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fatigue, tiredness(4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fatigue, e.g., lack of sleep, trouble getting up in the morning (3)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of motivation, lack of interest (3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of motivation, no initiative, isolation (3)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>negative influence of friends (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>friends keeping me up all night</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>bad weather, driving in storms (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the winter, weather conditions (2)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>insufficient transportation (3) distance from school (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>problems with transportation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>personal issues, stress (2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>other aspects of life, being very busy</li> </ul>

Six learners mentioned that the negative behaviours and actions of other learners affected their rate of progress. Five mentioned that some teachers were too strict, or tried to cover too much material at one time. They felt that this negatively influenced their rate of progress. The reverse, as we shall see in the next section, is also true.

### **Positive influences on learners' rate of progress**

Learners felt that the teacher was the overall most positive influence in helping them make progress in their program. Nearly half of the learners surveyed (27 out of 60) referred to the important role of the teacher in encouraging, supporting and guiding them. Several qualities of a 'good' teacher mentioned by learners include enthusiasm, friendliness, sense of humour, open-mindedness, patience and dependability. Learners also mentioned that the teacher helped keep them on track.

One student took the time to record a particular event on her questionnaire. See below:

#### **A Good Teacher**

I think a very positive influence in making and maintaining good progress is the quality of the staff. To illustrate this point, I will recount an event that occurred early in my upgrading class. One day an individual behind me was having difficulty with his work. His frustration was palpable. The instructor sat down to help and the young man was somewhat unreceptive and rude. The instructor showed him many ways to do the problem. His response was to, "Forget it. I'll figure it out later." She persevered gently and in the end she helped the young man with his problem. He actually said he was sorry.

I like to think my instructor had the insight to understand that students come to upgrading with a lot of baggage and that through his protests, he was actually saying, "I'm frustrated. I don't want to feel stupid again!" School is after all where we first learn that we're not bright. I sat in class thinking that I had learned much more than math that day. I regard upgrading as such a hopeful place.

Twelve learners noted specific program features such as comfortable, positive surroundings, a flexible schedule, a strict attendance policy, additional time to complete

work, working at own pace, getting clear instructions, using self-tests to prepare for final tests, maintaining a focus, taking part in the Study Skills program, accessing peer tutoring, having a resource person in the classroom and small classes.

Ten learners accredited their families, friends and other classmates for helping them make progress. With reference to classmates, learners said it was helpful “having people around that are serious about the program” and “seeing other people move along.”

Five learners mentioned the importance of goals, i.e., knowing their goals, interest in their goals and achieving their goals Five also mentioned motivation, the desire to learn, initiative to finish, dedication, determination and achievement.

### **Positives influences on learners’ attendance**

While learners attributed their progress in LBS programs mainly to their teachers, they identified three major influences that helped them attend regularly.

They are:

- features of the program itself such as a flexible schedule, attendance cards, self-paced learning, and interesting subjects (15 responses)
- motivation such as the desire to learn, determination and dedication (14)
- achievement of goals (11)

Four learners discussed the importance of not falling behind. Some of their comments include:

- If you miss too much you can fall behind. You don’t want to fall behind.
- When you miss one day, you want to keep missing.
- The more time spent in the program, the faster you finish.
- People who move through the program very fast go on to get good paying jobs.

### **Summary Highlights**

We feel the concept of force field analysis has potential as a simple, non-threatening way for learners to explore and overcome the barriers that get in the way of their full participation in programs. Managing forces fits well with the self-management part of the Self-Management/Self-Direction learning outcome. The concept can be used in orientation to help lessen or eliminate serious situational barriers. It can be integrated into the regular progress review process as a reflection piece. Managing forces is an ongoing challenge for learners. As we well know, learners can disappear from the

program at any time, even when they are doing well. The concept of force field analysis might also be incorporated into learning activities such as journal writing and demonstration activities related to career exploration.



Log onto the following web site to see an activity that guides a group of learners in thinking about the forces that hinder and help them to achieve their goals.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/%7Encsall/fob/2000/focteach.html>



View the *Retention through Redirection* video (10 minutes). What positive forces helped Rijha move in the direction of her goal? What negative forces steered her away from her goal?

## Self-Efficacy

The second support we will explore briefly is self-efficacy, which for the purposes of this study is defined as the feeling of being able to accomplish a task within the context of the LBS program. While the term may be new, the concept is not. Programs have always focused efforts on recognizing learners' program successes and accomplishments. See **Appendix M** for sample of a certificate that celebrates the learner's completion of an LBS level.

Self-efficacy is strongly linked to self-direction. This means that learners should be engaged in learning and demonstration activities that encourage them to make decisions and solve problems on their own. Activities should be designed, therefore, to promote self-reflection and self-confidence.

An article by Barell mentions specific strategies to promote self-efficacy. One is to encourage learners to set goals for their own personal development. This is very much connected to the self-direction part of the Self-Management/Self-Direction learning outcome and is associated with three features in particular: self-confidence building skills, personal advocacy and self-motivation skills.



Check the following web site to learn more about self-efficacy and how it was used in the NSCALL study.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/%7Encsall/fob/2000/comings.html>

# Feature # 6

## Access to personal, career and academic counselling

Although the practitioner questionnaire did not specifically ask about counselling or counselling services, several practitioners mentioned how important it was to have access to “a professional counsellor familiar with all the training programs in the region to ensure correct referral.”

Access to counselling is a problem for some LBS programs, “We used to have career counsellors who could meet with students, assess skills and interests and advise.” Lack of counselling services seems particularly problematic for smaller programs and campuses. This is sometimes offset by smaller classes where faculty are able to work more closely with individual learners. In some instances, a practitioner will take on ‘counselling’ responsibilities. Some campuses may have an ‘agreement’ with the main campus to provide certain counselling services. The Internet offers alternatives as well.



The following website provides a variety of self-assessment tools, tips for occupational research, help with decision-making and suggestions for employment contacts.

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocecs/CRC/manual-home.html>

## Areas of Responsibility

Another practitioner wondered who should be responsible for redirecting learners:

*Who is to oversee this process? Our counsellor has knowledge and access to career information that is far more extensive than I have. She would be the one to provide the answers here unless it becomes a faculty-driven process. Then it would have to be a department initiative with everyone contributing to the planning. The whole thing would have to be done very gently.*

This raises some important issues. While the counsellor (academic/program advisor) has always played a pivotal part in redirecting learners, the role of the counsellor varies considerably from college to college. In some colleges the counsellor works closely with learners during the orientation or goal-setting process. The counsellor might teach specific courses on career exploration or study skills. In other colleges the counsellor is

primarily responsible for career counselling. Whatever the situation may be, it is critical for the counsellor to have adequate and relevant information. To successfully redirect learners, the counsellor must consider a wide variety of factors such as the learner's age, condition of health, amount of family or community support, cognitive ability, attendance, rate of progress, time already spent in the program and level of motivation. The counsellor must weigh each factor and decide, ultimately, if the learner's goal is still achievable. An effective system must be in place, therefore, for information to flow smoothly among all parties involved: the support staff, the practitioner, the counsellor and the learner. This means that areas of responsibility must be clearly established and agreed upon.



Reflect on the roles of the different participants in your program. Review the chart below. Add more participants and other types of information as needed. Check off who needs to know what information (some categories may not apply). Think about why. Think about how the information is shared. Think about how well it is shared.

<b>Information Needed</b>	<b>Support Staff</b>	<b>Practitioner</b>	<b>Counsellor/ Program Advisor</b>	<b>Learner</b>
• learner's educational and work history				
• learner's sponsor				
• learner's attendance patterns				
• learner's rate of progress				
• learner's long-term goal				
• learner's short-term goal				
• prerequisites for long-term goal				
• learner's obstacles to goals				
• career and employment options for learner				

# Feature # 7

**Awareness of the different types of redirection options available for learners**

Any process or protocol that involves redirecting learners implies the existence of options. While we had an idea of what some of those options might be, we wanted to see if we could identify some categories or types of redirection options. To do this we examined a number of 'situations' where learners had been experiencing persistent and severe personal or program difficulties over a period of time. In many situations, a series of interventions had already been tried. The final analysis in each case, however, was the same. The long-term goal no longer appeared realistic for that learner at that particular point in his/her life. The learner was at risk.

Several factors were examined including the learner's rate of progress, attendance, motivation and commitment to the program. Demographic and situational factors were also considered, e.g., the learners' age, health and family demands. Eventually we were able to identify five distinct types of redirection. These were reviewed with practitioners through consultations at different colleges. No additional types have been identified at this point.

## Options for Redirection

The types of redirection options are:

- **Postponement of the goal** – the learner is experiencing serious situational barriers and has to put his/her goal 'on hold' until the problems are under control
- **Shift to a different goal path** – the learner may be in financial crisis and may have to consider working instead of studying for a while
- **Shift to a different career goal within the same goal path** – the learner may discover a more interesting career goal through career research and wants to switch over
- **Adjustment of the goal up or down** – the learner still likes his/her career choice but may discover s/he has greater or weaker academic ability and therefore wants to adjust his/her goals accordingly
- **Different route to the goal** – the learner wants to keep his/her long-term goal but finds the route too long or too short and needs to seek a new route

What kinds of specific options are available for learners? That depends on many factors but now we can use the types of redirection options as a model for thinking about specific options.

See **Appendix N** for a chart that provides additional reasons for redirection and specific options for each type of redirection.

See **Appendix O** for five case studies illustrating successful examples of redirection.

## **Challenges of Redirection**

What are some of the challenges we can anticipate in redirecting learners? There will be many. While articulation of the process might shed some light on the overall process, redirecting learners remains a daunting task for LBS faculty. Often learners don't want to change their goals, even when they are not progressing. It's hard "convincing some learners that a change is in their best interest," or "getting learners on a realistic plane relevant to all factors, e.g., home, finances, academic abilities." Sometimes, too, learners feel it is a reflection of their abilities if they need to change their goals.

### **Learners' reluctance**

We asked practitioners to identify challenges involved in redirecting learners, for example, from post secondary to trades or employment. There was a strong sense that many learners are reluctant to change their goals due in some part to the constraints of the programs themselves. One program used to have career counsellors who could meet with students, assess their skills and interests and advise them. This service is no longer available and consequently learners are no longer fully aware of their options. Another program constraint is the time it takes to do a successful redirection involving a thorough assessment, career interest inventories and temperament type indicators. Other challenges to redirection had to do with unrealistic goals imposed by sponsoring agencies. It is not always easy to convince the sponsor that changing goals is a valid, necessary step for the learner. One practitioner did note that sponsors will often 'come around' if enough effort is made.

Learners themselves indicated a reluctance to change their goals. Nearly half of the 60 learners who completed the questionnaire said they were 'not willing' or only 'somewhat willing' to change their goals and the focus of their program.

## **Practitioners' reluctance**

Practitioners too may be reluctant to redirect learners to other goals. They often see post secondary as a clearer path:

*We can get them there and be sure they go on. With a job, we can get them ready, but there's no guarantee that a job will result. With trades, it is often difficult to get an apprenticeship set up so that puts another barrier in their way.*

One practitioner noted that few options are available for learners who cannot progress to post secondary but who do not want unskilled work. Even if they did, there is a lack of knowledge on the part of employers about the LBS program. Because employers do not accept LBS credits, students hang onto their post secondary goals whether they can achieve them or not. The labour market situation can push up entry level requirements too, "Most trades and employment today require post secondary training and or other certificates."

## **Conditions for Success**

Three important conditions are required for the Redirection Protocol to be successful in increasing learner retention. First of all the concept of redirection needs to be introduced to learners at an early stage in their program. Learners usually establish their goals in orientation or through other courses that focus on initial goal-setting. This can also be an opportunity for learners to begin reflecting on the positive and negative forces that will steer them towards or away from their goals, and why some of them may have to change their goals. The most important message for learners is that no matter what new direction they may take, they will always have options. Even if the redirection involves the learner withdrawing from the program altogether, it will be an 'informed withdrawal' and an informed decision to withdraw carries with it a plan for future action, and hope. (Ohio Department of Education Adult Basic and Literacy Education)

Secondly, all parties, including learners, must work together to ensure a co-ordinated, systematic process for reviewing goals. Much will depend on the program's ability to help learners refocus their goals and provide the kind of support necessary to achieve them. This kind of support may include tailoring learning activities to the new goals of the learner and linking learners to other educational services and community agencies. While some programs are already doing this, others will need to evaluate their capacity to provide this kind of delivery and these kinds of linkages.

Thirdly, programs need to have clear definitions for goal achievement and learner retention in order to measure the effectiveness of their redirection protocol or other retention strategies they may implement.

It is our firm belief that redirection efforts will promote retention in LBS college programs. By helping learners refocus to shorter and more manageable goals, programs can create more options for learners and increase opportunities for learners to be successful. Successful learners are more likely to persist and more likely to return when they do have to ‘stop out.’



View the Retention through Redirection video again. How did Rijha’s teachers help her prepare for the next step of her goal? How is Rijha’s long-term goal of self-employment influencing what she is learning in the program?

See **Appendix P** for samples of customized demonstrations that Rijha’s teacher designed for her.

## REFERENCES

- Barell, John. (1995) *Pathways to School Improvement, Critical Issue: Working Toward Student Self-Direction and Personal Efficacy as Educational Goals*. North Central Educational Laboratory.
- Barton, Sue. (1999) *Practitioner Research Briefs, 1998 - 1999 Report Series Goal-setting in the New River Valley: Teachers' Perceptions and Strategies*. Virginia Adult Education Research Network.
- Jonik, Mary and Dee Goforth. (2000) *What Works Phase 1*. Literacy and Basic Skills College Sector Committee.
- Kerka, Sandra. (1995) *New Teacher Toolkit, Adult Learner Retention Revisited*. Centre for Initiatives in Education, College of Education, Southwest Texas University.
- Ohio Department of Education Adult Basic and Literacy Education. (1998) *Program Administrators' Manual*. Ohio Department of Education Adult Basic and Literacy Education.
- Precure, Agnes. (2000) *Learning Matters: Orientation and Goal-setting*. Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, Basic Skills and Family Literacy Unit.
- Seidman, Alan. (1996) *Retention Revisited: RET = E Id + (E + I + C) Iv*. Collegeways: Retention Journal.
- West Virginia Adult Education Association. (2000) *Planet Mars: Plan to Empower Teachers with Marketing and Retention Strategies*. West Virginia Adult Education Association.