

Success Factors in High Achieving Adult Learners



A project of the Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
Supported by a grant from Dollar General Literacy Foundation

Success Factors in High Achieving Adult Learners

*A project of the Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
Supported by a grant from
Dollar General Literacy Foundation*

About the Florida Literacy Coalition

Established in 1985, The Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida.

As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's State Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.

Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center
934 North Magnolia Ave, Suite 104
Orlando, Florida 32803
(407) 246-7110
www.floridaliteracy.org

Acknowledgements

The Florida Literacy Coalition would like to thank Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the adult learners who participated in this study and the individuals who recommended them for the project.

Adult Learner Participants: Monica Baxley, Tonya Blanton, Laura Calderon, Jose DeMoranville, Guadalupe Lamas, Ubirathan Miranda, Maria Segura, and Noriko Tilley.

Authors:

Gregory Smith
Executive Director
Florida Literacy Coalition

Alyssa Baer
AmeriCorps* VISTA Member
Florida Literacy Coalition

Graphic design by Kimberly Webster

Copyright ©2007 by the Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

This publication was funded through a grant from Dollar General Literacy Foundation. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this material are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Dollar General Literacy Foundation. This document may be reproduced for use by adult literacy programs. It may not be sold or included as a part of any print, video, or electronic product that will be sold unless prior written permission is obtained from the Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Biographies.....	2
About the Adult Learners.....	6
Interviews.....	7
The Big Five Personality Test.....	14
Ties to the Research.....	17
Bibliography.....	19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why do certain adult literacy students succeed while others do not? The drop out rate in adult basic education and literacy programs is troublingly high. One third of Adult Basic Education (ABE) students leave their programs before advancing an educational level. In a recent review of adult education programs in Florida, only 25% of students studying for the GED took and passed the test.

Guided by research in adult learner persistence, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) conducted case studies of eight former adult education and literacy students who have successfully obtained their GEDs and gone on to distinguish themselves in admirable ways. It was our hope to learn from these individuals and their successes.

Using a qualitative research approach, this study used one-to-one interviews, on-line surveys and personality tests to explore the life influences and personality characteristics that contributed to the educational experiences of these individuals.

While the narrow scope of this project limits our ability to apply the findings to a broader adult education population, the results do provide some interesting information to consider. The high correlation in a number of areas pertaining to adult learner experiences, perceptions and personality characteristics provides insight into subject matter that may be worthy of further study. These included:

- 1) Participants overwhelmingly conveyed the importance of having teachers who were encouraging, supportive and willing to put in the extra effort to help them succeed.
- 2) A majority of participants were (A) first born children, (B) grew up in poor or low income families, and (C) moved frequently when they were children.
- 3) The majority had negative school experiences and left school before completing the 9th grade.
- 4) All attended classes or tutoring sessions with a relatively high level of intensity. The average attendance was 16.6 hours per week.
- 5) All participated in small classes or one-to-one tutoring.
- 6) Goal setting was an important factor for most of the participants.
- 7) There were strong correlations in several personality characteristics, including conscientiousness.
- 8) All are involved in their communities, and 7 out of 8 support adult education and literacy as staff or volunteers.
- 9) All clearly articulated that adult education changed their lives.

Stories of exceptional individuals can serve to both inform and inspire. It is our hope that the experiences and advice shared by these outstanding individuals will be a resource for adult learners and educators alike.

FLC gives special thanks to Dollar General Literacy Foundation for supporting this initiative and to our participating adult learners for sharing their stories and experiences.

Gregory Smith
Executive Director
Florida Literacy Coalition

BIOGRAPHIES



Monica Baxley

Monica Baxley is a 45-year-old native of Florida who dropped out of school in the 9th grade. She has a learning disability that was not suitably addressed in school as a child, leading to her have very limited literacy skills as an adult.

After a series of uncomfortable and unsuccessful adult education classroom experiences, Baxley was motivated to return to adult education at the **Literacy Volunteers of Washington County (LVWC)**, to help her only child with homework. LVWC appealed to Baxley because of its one-on-one format, thereby allowing her to keep her limited reading ability under wraps. Baxley obtained her GED within eight months of starting at LVWC and now speaks out freely about her experience in hopes of encouraging others to go back to school. “I speak to anybody that will listen to me about literacy,” said Baxley.

Currently, Baxley is a volunteer teacher with the Country Oaks Learning Center in Washington County. She is also a literacy ambassador and student advocate, serving on the Board of Directors for the Florida Literacy Coalition and VALUE, a national organization of adult learners. She has helped three people get their GEDs and in 2004, she received the Florida Literacy Coalition’s “Flight for Freedom: Outstanding Student Achievement” award.

Maria Segura is a 39-year-old native of Mexico. She left school in the tenth grade, after getting married. Segura worked in the fields with her family to make a living. After fainting one day, while packing tomatoes, she decided, “I don’t want to spend the rest of my life working in the fields, migrating from place to place.” She wanted a better life and a way to help her children, but she needed a program that would provide free childcare. Segura then learned about the **Jump Start Family Literacy Program**. Her son Anthony was three years old at the time, and Jump Start gave them the opportunity to learn together. “I could stand up and look over the divider and I could see him, and then I would get back to my studies,” said Segura.



Maria Segura

When Anthony saw his mother learning, he would get excited. “He was saying, ‘Mommy, you’re reading a book!’” Segura said. Her son’s passion motivated her even more, and despite resistance from her family, Segura successfully obtained her GED in seven months. She now works at Jump Start Family Literacy program as the lead teacher. Segura plans to seek a bachelor’s degree, but currently she is focused on helping her children attend college.



Laura Calderon

Laura Calderon's family moved from Mexico to the United States when she was in eighth grade. Her family was very poor and, as the oldest child she dropped out of school as a young teenager to work in the fields to help support her family. She worked in the fields for five years; during this time, she married and had a daughter.

Her daughter and husband were the main motivators for Calderon to enter into adult education. Calderon's husband would read to their daughter every night and encouraged Calderon to go back to school to provide a better life for their daughter. Due to their support, Calderon and her daughter joined the **Glades Tri-City Family Education Center**, an initiative of the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition. In less than three years, Laura progressed through more than eight grade levels and received her GED.

After Calderon obtained her GED, she became an AmeriCorps volunteer for two years at the Glades Family Education Center. At the end of her service she received an education award, and is currently using that money to take college courses. The recipient of the 2005 Susan Green Award, a national student recognition award, Calderon currently is a day instructor in the Glades program, while pursuing a career as a teacher.

Calderon is an active literacy ambassador, regularly accepting speaking engagements to promote and support literacy. In 2003, she was a featured speaker at the Florida Celebration of Literacy Event, sharing the stage with President George H.W. Bush, Barbara Bush and Governor Jeb Bush.

Noriko Tilley is a 44-year-old Japanese born woman. Tilley graduated from high school in Japan and spent two years learning English and German at a vocational school. In 1988, Tilley married a U.S. air force officer. They moved back and forth several times between Japan and the United States. During that period, Tilley and her husband had two children.

While her children were at school, Tilley would shop with friends and maintain her home. Twenty years after she graduated from vocational school, Tilley decided she wanted more of her life. She enrolled in **Oskaloosa-Walton Community College's** ESOL class and then at the recommendation of her instructor, she took a GED class and passed the examination after two months.



Noriko Tilley

Tilley went full circle from student to teacher; she now works at the college as a college level accounting tutor and adult education proctor.



Guadalupe Lamas

Guadalupe Lamas is a 46-year-old native of Mexico, the firstborn child into a migrant farm working family. Growing up in a migrant farm working family, she had to leave school in the sixth grade to take care of her seven younger siblings. Lamas was married and pregnant with her second child when she enrolled in an adult education program at her job site, sponsored by the **Hillsborough County Adult Migrant Program**. The promise of a stipend initially motivated Lamas to participate.

After Lamas realized that getting an education was possible, she followed her dream to make a better life for her children. “For the first time, I think, in my life I realized that I was capable of maybe even more,” Lamas said. Within about six weeks, Lamas obtained her GED and she continued to pursue her education.

Lamas attended Hillsborough Community College to seek a career as a nurse; she eventually earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree.

Now Lamas is a registered nurse and an adult education instructor teaching certified nurse assistant classes in her community. She is also an advocate on issues that affect the migrant farm worker community.

Joses DeMoranville is a 50-year-old U.S. born man. As the third born child out of 28 siblings, DeMoranville grew up in extreme poverty. DeMoranville’s impoverished situation forced him to drop out of school in the third grade, when he was living on the streets. After dealing with drugs, alcohol and homelessness, DeMoranville’s 12-Step Program sponsor took him to a literacy program in 1992, after discovering that DeMoranville could not read.



Joses DeMoranville

After a successful experience with the **Palm Beach Library Literacy Program**, DeMoranville attended **Leon County Schools Adult and Community Education Program** where he obtained his GED in three months. “I had that gift of desperation. It was something I really wanted even though I didn’t think I could ever get it,” said DeMoranville.

Currently, DeMoranville lives with his wife in Jacksonville.

He has a certificate in architectural drafting and owns his own business. DeMoranville, a passionate advocate for adult literacy; is a volunteer with Learn to Read Jacksonville.



Ubirathan “Ubi” Miranda

Ubirathan “Ubi” Miranda is a 32-year-old Brazilian born man who dropped out of high school after immigrating to Florida. Health problems, immigration concerns and racism at his school all factored into reasons why Miranda left school before graduation. Miranda immigrated to the United States with his family when he was in fifth grade. He was actually in the fifth grade for three years, because his family moved so frequently: he never got a chance to complete it.

After a series of dead end jobs Miranda came to the realization that getting an education was key to building a better life. He enrolled in night classes at **East Area Adult High School** and obtained his GED in two months, working during the day and attending class in the evening.

Currently, Miranda is a network manager at Auburndale high school and he teaches ESOL to students at the East Area Adult High School, the program where he got his start. He obtained his B.A. in theology, graduating from Life Christian University and then went on to obtain his M.B.A. Miranda lives in Winter Haven with his wife and two children.

A 30-year-old American born woman, *Tonya Blanton* was the oldest child in her middle-class family. During Blanton’s childhood, her family moved more than five times. In second grade, Blanton’s school diagnosed her with a learning disability in math and reading. Blanton’s second grade teacher told her family, “Tonya will never do anything, because she is too slow.” In eleventh grade Blanton dropped out of school. “Because of my learning disability, I was pretty much kept in the same class. I was really not able to go anywhere and I got tired of it,” Blanton said.

After a few unsuccessful attempts at a small adult education program, Blanton got married and had two children. She worked at a gas station where, she said, “they don’t really see you as a human, they see you as someone who can work three shifts.” Blanton tried adult education again in part when she realized she could not help her third grade daughter with her homework.

After starting at **North Florida Community College** (NFCC), Blanton obtained her GED in five months. Her teachers saw in her an innate ability to help other students and encouraged her to become a teacher. Blanton now works as a teacher’s aide for the Adult Education Department of North Florida Community College and in 2006 won the NFCC “Student of the Year” award.



Tonya Blanton

ABOUT THE ADULT LEARNERS

3 American Born, **5** Immigrants (**3** of whom had been migrant farm workers)
Their ages range between 30 and 50 years old.

Family

All are married; **7**^{of 8} have children

6^{of 8} identified their family's income while growing up as either poor/very low income or low income

6^{of 8} are first born

6^{of 8} moved 4 or more times while growing up

School

6^{of 8} struggled with reading and writing (English) when starting the adult education process

2^{of 8} identified themselves as having a learning disability

7^{of 8} left school before graduating from high school

5^{of 8} left before completing 9th grade

Reasons for Leaving School

- “Had a learning disability.”
- “Lived on the streets.”
- “Oldest of eight – had to care for siblings/support family.”
- “Got married.”
- “Family issues and racial discrimination.”
- “Too hard – wasn’t getting it.”
- “Had to go to work.”

2^{of 8} had positive school experiences as a child

Highest Degree Earned

GED: **6**

Master's Degree: **2** (both former ESOL students)

Work

7^{of 8} are now working in higher paying jobs than before they enrolled in adult education

Areas of Employment:

- Architectural Design
- Registered Nurse
- Lead Teacher at Jump Start Family Literacy Program
- Teacher Aide for the Adult Education Department of North Florida Community College
- Day School Instructor at Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition
- Full Time Volunteer at Country Oaks Learning Center
- Network Manager
- College level Accounting Teacher

INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews with the participating adult learners produced a wealth of information. The following section summarizes major themes that emerged during these discussions and provides selected quotes from the participants.

What was life like before enrolling in adult education?

7 OF **8** described negative life experiences.

These included – dead end jobs, long work days, high levels of stress, drugs, alcohol, jail and homelessness.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“The hardest part was not being able to help my child with his homework and trying to keep it a secret from everyone.”</p> <p>“Very sad and very stressful. I didn’t have any goals or any dreams, there was just no future.”</p>	<p>“Just work in the fields. My job started at 5 in the morning and ended at 7 at night. It was difficult because you keep hiding and you don’t want no one to know that you have these problems, so you cover it up.”</p>
----------------	--	--

What motivated you to go back to school?

7 OF **8** described people and/or finances as the primary motivating factors.

Family was the most cited motivator.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“My husband said, “You’re not stupid. You’re smart, you just need to find that.”</p> <p>“What motivated me was the idea that I could make a better life for my children.”</p>	<p>“My daughter came home with geometry which I had never done before, and I had to look her in the eye and tell her, ‘you know, I do not know how to do that.’”</p>
----------------	--	--

“I got tied into a 12 step program and I wanted my life to change and a sponsor took me to the program.”

“Helping my daughter with her homework.”

“I came from a lot of poverty and instability...I seen my parents having to really sweat it out to earn money — having to change jobs frequently and having to pretty much settle for whatever a boss would say...”

Tell me about the adult education program you attended.

7 OF **8** talked about good teachers.

“They [the teachers] really showed me that they cared. They really wanted me to get this education that I wanted.”

“The teachers up there are amazing... We were always given, ‘Hey you need help, come to me I’m ready for it, help me out.’ They were great.”

“It was a very family setting and everybody was very friendly.”

“We went around barriers and we came up with a solution where I was welcome and I could learn.”

“First with the administration, they were very kind. Very open, honest. They really encouraged us.”

“They were willing to work with me after hours because I didn’t want anyone to know.”

Intensity

Classroom/tutoring time ranged from 4 – 40 hours per week.
The average: 16.6 hours per week.

Time in Program

Range: 6 weeks to 2.5 years.
4 of 8 were enrolled less than 6 months.

Instructional Environment

All students were in a small class or received one-to-one tutoring.

What did you like most about the learning environment?

Supportive teachers and administrators were key.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“Students encouraged and helped each other. If one of us was discouraged, somebody would come over and pat you on the back and say, ‘Okay, let’s try it this way.’”</p>	<p>“That we were together; parent and child were together.”</p>
	<p>“It was a very encouraging environment. Very conducive to learning.”</p>	<p>“What I liked the most was the enthusiasm of the teachers. They were always willing to help and they were always available to help with my questions and always devoted time to me one-on-one.”</p>
	<p>“The director was the main motivation for me because she was there no matter what the question or what the time of day.”</p>	<p>“The teachers, the students, everybody there. It feels like a family.”</p>

Did you attend other adult education programs prior to this experience?

4^{OF} **8** had attended other programs, of whom, 3 had negative experiences.

What did you like least about it?

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“My learning disability was the biggest obstacle...I tried to push against it or deny that I had it. But I have accepted it now and I’ve learned how to work around it instead of trying to push through it. If she [my teacher] didn’t feel like I was getting it or I told her I wasn’t getting it, she would find another way to try and get me to understand it, even if took drawing pictures or dancing.”</p>	<p>“The fact that it wasn’t a real school type. I felt like I was in somebody’s back room or something.”</p>
		<p>“Independent study.”</p>

Did it differ from your school experience as a child?

All participants said yes.

5 OF **8** shared that they had negative experiences as children in school.

IN THEIR WORDS

“In school they used to tell me, in fact, my second grade teacher told my family that ‘Tonya would never do anything, because she is too slow to do anything.’”

“I was separated from the ‘normal’ children. And you felt that the other children would pick on me and even in high school I had a lot of them pick on me. And there [in adult education] I wasn’t set apart. I was a group. I didn’t feel any different than anybody else.”

“It was very disciplined. It was a religious organization telling me that I was going to go to Hell all my life.”

“School as a child was highly inflexible. I faced issues of racism.”

“I didn’t have to be a public spectacle like I did in school when I would raise my hand and ask something and just still didn’t get it and the kids were laughing and all.”

Did Adult Education Change Your Life?

All participants said yes.

IN THEIR WORDS

“I have drive. I have a goal in life now. My life has forever been changed by the experiences.”

“Today, I don’t have a job, I have a career. Makes a difference.”

“It opened up for the first time the opportunities and the perception that I could. Prior to that I just assumed I couldn’t. I don’t know where you develop this mindset that you’re not as smart or you cannot achieve what other people can when you grow up as a migrant farm worker child.”

“I have more self-confidence now and I’m not afraid to let people know that I have this problem and that there is help out there.”

“This was a starting point of many successes because that enabled me to go to college and then college courses enabled me to get jobs.”

“I always say there is not a guide to be a parent — so there was a lot of help during the parenting sessions on learning how children develop and grow...I was reading everyday and then story time became a very important time in my family.”

What was it about your personality or situation that led you to stick with it?

Most cited supportive family members/teachers and/or a ‘stubborn’ personality.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“My husband always supported my daughter and I coming to school.”</p>	<p>“I have an addictive personality so I just wanted more. And it was great. I loved learning and I still to this day read everything I can get my hands on.”</p>
	<p>“I’m kind of like stubborn...I like to actually accomplish what I start.”</p>	

Did you set goals, and if so, what were they?

7 OF **8** had goals going into the program. These goals often evolved over time.

- Most wanted to get a GED and/or improve their English.
- The general consensus was that goal setting was important.

Did your family play a role in supporting or hindering your studies?

4 OF **8** said they had strong family support.

3 OF **8** indicated that family hindered their studies.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“They didn’t put a value on education because they didn’t see education as a means to success. They saw hard work as a means of success.”</p>	<p>“My husband would work with me at home with whatever issues had come up and my daughter was just like, ‘well, Mom you always tell me I can do it, you can do it.’ Just real encouraging.”</p>
	<p>“I was struggling with an algebra problem...and my daughter Ashton she came up to me and said, ‘Mommy, here’s the answer.’ It’s like, well gee, my daughter’s a pretty big math whiz.”</p>	

What were the major obstacles or barriers you had to overcome to succeed?

While different reasons were given, the most cited barriers communicated on the survey were related to work demands and child care needs.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“Having your husband tell you, you can’t do it or ‘I need help. I need you to work.”</p>	<p>“My learning disability was the biggest obstacle...I tried to push against it or deny that I had it. But I have accepted it now and I’ve learned how to work around it instead of trying to push through it. If she [my teacher] didn’t feel like I was getting it or I told her I wasn’t getting it, she would find another way to try and get me to understand it, even if took drawing pictures or dancing.”</p>
	<p>“Language and culture.”</p>	
	<p>“Financial obligations.”</p>	
	<p>“I would say one of them was beating myself up for not having the skills and confidence that I needed.”</p>	

Was there a turning point in your life that influenced your success?

6 OF **8** cited a turning point.

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“The turning point for me was when another student had come in and they were real shaky about doing the program. My director asked me to talk to this person and tell them how things went with me and then I started working one on one with this person and getting them along.”</p>	<p>“The moment I met my teachers.”</p> <p>“Entering the 12 step program.”</p> <p>“Jump Start opened the doors. When you’re working in the fields you want to do something better because I knew I could do something better. I just needed the help.”</p>
	<p>“Coming to America.”</p>	

Are you involved in community, faith or volunteer activities?

All are involved in the community.

7 OF **8** directly support adult education and literacy programs as staff or volunteers.

Roles:

- Teacher’s aide
- Literacy ambassador/public speaker
- Teacher/public speakers
- Community activist on issues related to immigration/migrant farm workers
- Translator
- Tutor/Board member
- ESOL instructor/church volunteer

What words of advice would you share with teachers?

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“Share your heart, be passionate and be understanding. Once you’ve captured their heart, you pretty much got their minds.”</p>	<p>“Please be patient.”</p>
	<p>“Understand different cultures and let them know that to be an adult student is not easy because sometimes we feel, we feel embarrassed to, if other people know that we don’t know, it’s very hard.”</p>	<p>“Let the student know that you are there and that no matter what happens that you’re going to be there and that education is number one. That nobody can take that away from you.”</p>
	<p>“Take the time. Have patience. If you take the time and have patience the rewards are beyond measure.”</p>	<p>“Listen to what the student is trying to say to you and understand that the way that you come across to them may not work one way. You may have to talk a different way to a particular student.”</p>

What words of advice would you share with other students or potential students?

IN THEIR WORDS	<p>“Whatever obstacles they find in life, if you can’t push through them, you can’t go over them, you can’t go under them, then try to find a way around them.”</p>	<p>“They can do it too.”</p>
	<p>“If you [are] willing to do it there really are people out there to help you reach your goals. If I can do it anybody can.”</p>	<p>“Just work hard and don’t give up.”</p>
		<p>“Don’t give up because the miracle at the end is beyond your wildest dreams.”</p>
		<p>“Open up a book and open the doors of opportunity.”</p>

THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TEST

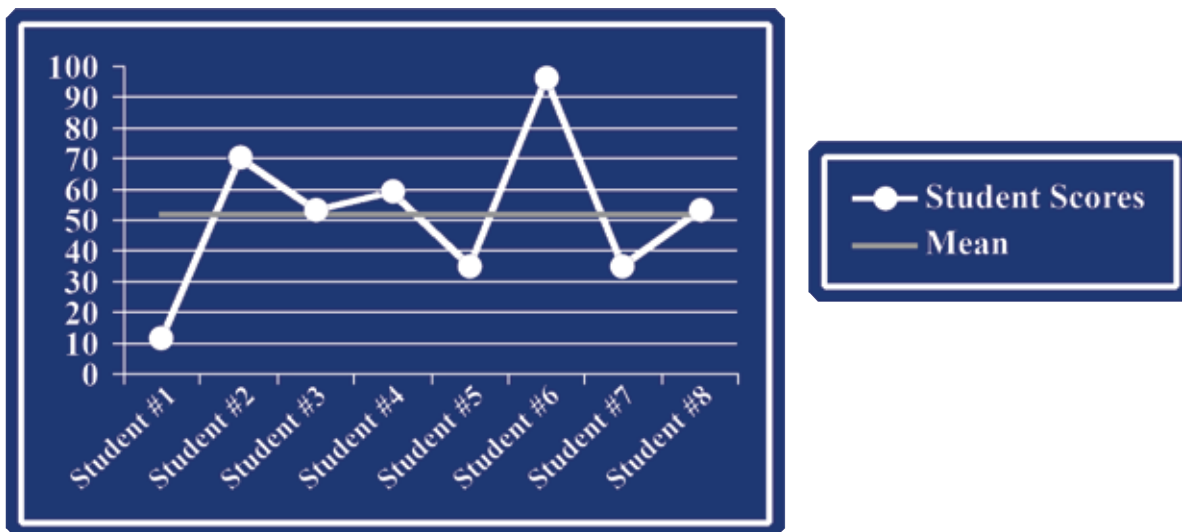
Each participating adult learner took the Big Five Personality Test as part of the project. The *Big Five* was originally developed in the 1970s by two independent research teams at: 1) the National Institute of Health and 2) University of Michigan working with the University of Oregon. The teams found that most human personality traits can be boiled down to five broad dimensions of personality, regardless of language or culture. In scientific circles, the Big Five is now one of the most widely accepted and used models of personality assessment.

As you will note, participants demonstrated a high level of correlation in three of the five personality areas.

1. Openness to Experience/Intellect

High scorers tend to be original, creative, curious and complex.

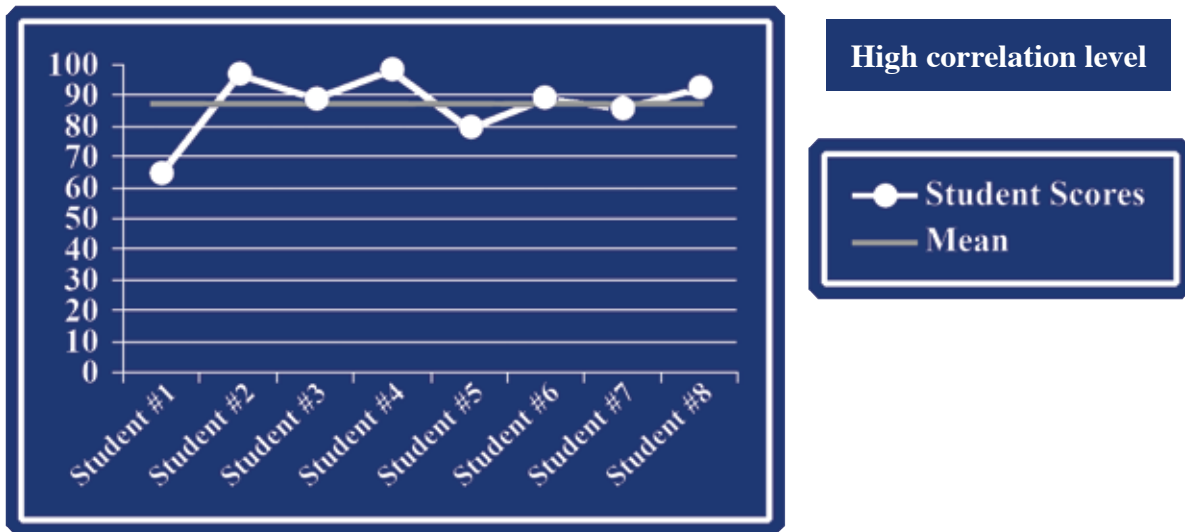
Low scorers tend to be conventional, down to earth, have narrower interests and be uncreative.



2. Conscientiousness

High scorers tend to be reliable, well-organized, self-disciplined and careful.

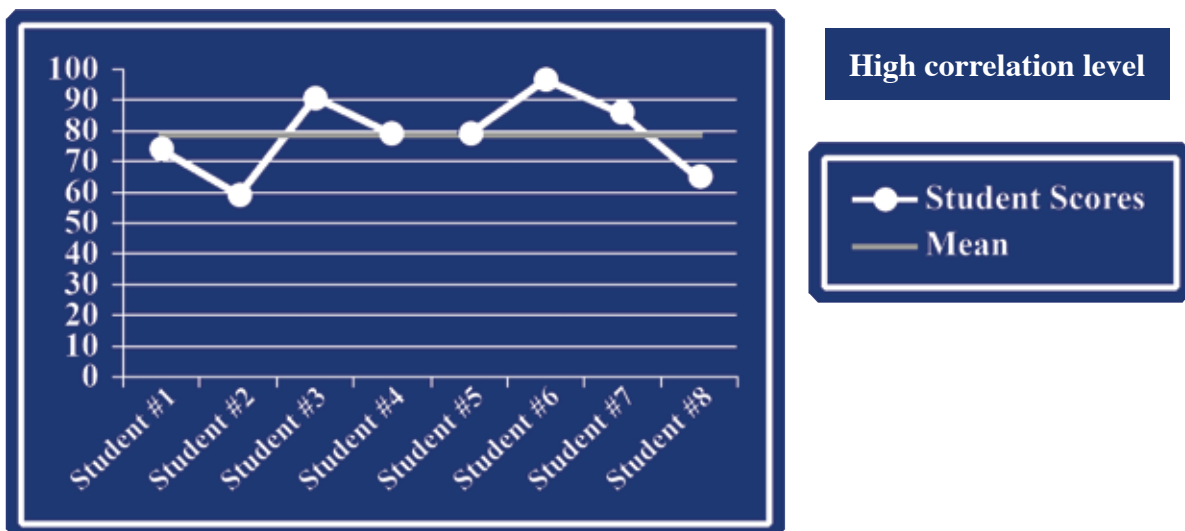
Low scorers tend to be disorganized, undependable and negligent.



3. Extraversion

High scorers tend to be sociable, friendly, fun-loving and talkative.

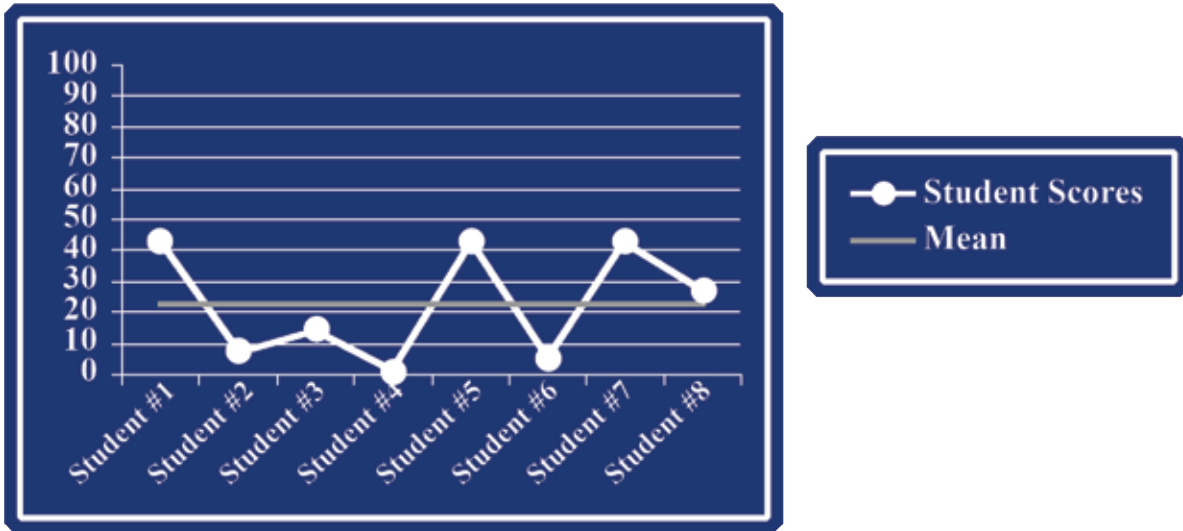
Low scorers tend to be introverted, reserved, inhibited and quiet.



4. Agreeableness

High scorers tend to be good natured, sympathetic, forgiving and courteous

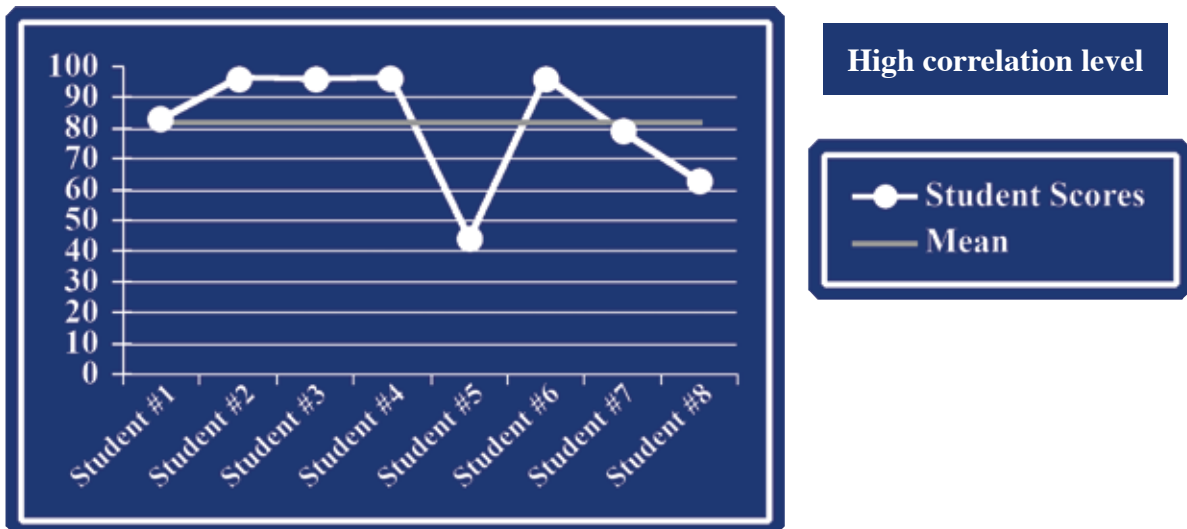
Low scorers tend to be critical, rude, harsh and callous.



5. Neuroticism

High scorers tend to be nervous, high-strung, unsure and worriers.

Low scorers tend to be calm, relaxed, secure and hardy.



TIES TO THE RESEARCH

A growing area of study in the field of adult education and literacy focuses on adult learner persistence. Unlike with children, most adults are volunteer learners and therefore are much more likely to discontinue their instruction if their needs and expectations are not met.

Research conducted in recent years, by John Comings and others, has focused on factors and variables involved in why some students persist and succeed in their studies while others do not. Researchers have defined *persistence* as a student's ability to continue his/her learning efforts long enough and at a level that is intensive enough to ensure significant progress toward their literacy goals.

Comings and a team of researchers from the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that successful students often needed supports to persist and that building supports may be more critical to increasing student persistence than removing barriers.

Adult students in this study had much more to say about supports to persistence than barriers to it. The most cited supports fell into four categories:

1. Goal Orientation

This study showed a significant relationship between persistence and having specific goals as a reason for entering adult basic education (ABE) programs. Theories of motivation suggest that students weigh the benefit of reaching their goals with the cost of participation. Therefore, defining, understanding, and focusing on their goals for participation may help adult students persist.

2. Personal Relationships

The most commonly mentioned factor among students was having the support of their families, friends, colleagues, God/church, support groups, community workers, mentors, and bosses. Programs that help students identify the people in their lives who can support their persistence and suggesting they ask for that support may help with persistence.

3. Teachers & Other Students

While this support is also a personal relationship, it is located inside of the classroom/program and may be something that programs can affect. Adult students said their teachers and their classmates were important to their persistence. Teachers should be helped to support their students' persistence, and students should be helped to support each other's persistence.

4. Self-efficacy

Students said that their own determination and self-efficacy (believing they can achieve their goals) was important to persistence and that helping students build their self-efficacy could lead to greater success. This case study's data is consistent overall with these research findings. All four of the above mentioned areas closely relate to prominent themes that emerged through out the interviews and surveys.

All but one of the study's participants had defined goals coming into their adult education programs. All developed and refined additional goals overtime, often evolving and maturing with the support of their teachers. Personal relationships were key to all of the participants, with family members and supportive teachers playing the most prominent roles.

When talking about teachers and administrators, all but one of the participants discussed the support, confidence and encouragement conveyed by these individuals and not specific instructional materials and approaches.

The participants' high levels of self-efficacy became apparent through the interviews and the Big 5 Personality Test results, particularly in the area of conscientiousness. Personality traits that are aligned with being reliable, well-organized and self-disciplined most likely played a prominent role in their success. Even participants who indicated that they initially had very low expectations as to what they could achieve, often characterized themselves as being stubborn and not likely to give up when they decided to do something.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adult Learner Research

- Comings, J., Cuban, S., Bos, J., & Porter, K. with Doolittle, F. 2003. As Long As It Takes: Responding to the Challenges of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.
- Tamassia, C., Lennon, M., Yamamoto, K., Kirsch, I. .2007. Adult Education in America, A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys. Educational Testing Service.
- John Comings, Andrea Parrella, & Lisa Soricone. 2000. Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports. FOB, Volume 4, Issue A. March.
- Comings, J., Cuban, S., Bos, J., & Taylor, C. 2001. I Did it For Myself: Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.
- Krystle Dima. 2005. Mexican-American Women Succeed Despite Adversity. Pulse. April
- Porter, K., Cuban, S., & Comings, J. with Chase, V. 2005. One Day I Will Make It: A Study of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.
- Comings, J., Parrella, A. & Soricone, L. Persistence. 1999. Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes.
- Taylor, J., Smith, C., & Bingman, B. with Bott, M., Gass, K., Lay, B., Taylor, D. A., & Tiedeman, K. 2005. Program Administrators' Sourcebook: A Resource on NCSALL's Research for Adult Education Program Administrators. December.

Big 5 Personality Test

- Potter, Jeff. The Big Five Personality Test. Out of Service. On-line. Available at: <http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/>. May 24, 2007 (c) 1996-2004
- Gosling, SD. Rentfrow, PJ. Swann, WB Jr. 2003. A very brief measure of the Big-Five personality domains. *Journal of Research in Personality*,
- Mount, MK. Barrick, MR. Scullen, SM. Rounds, J. 2005. Higher-Order Dimensions of the Big Five Personality Traits and the Big Six Vocational Interest Types- *Personnel Psychology*. Blackwell Synergy.



Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.
Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center
934 North Magnolia Ave, Suite 104
Orlando, Florida 32803
(407) 246-7110
www.floridaliteracy.org