



What I've Learned Over 20 Years in Adult Education

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Level Setting: This is my experience



Everyone's program is different and some of this will not be relevant.

But the underlining thoughts remain the same regardless



I've been on the ground much longer than in this position and I want to share what I found.



Outline of the Conversation

Outreach

How to Reach and Engage Adult Learners.

Assessments and Intake

When, Why and How

Relaying Class Expectations

Setting Up Learners for Success Through Clarity and Structure.

The Importance Of Storytelling

Why Should People Care About Your Work and How to Get Them to Say What You Want Them to Say.



My Roles in Adult Education

UW-Milwaukee: Educational Studies, Focus Adult Education

- Studied How Adults are Different From Children

@ Social Development Commission

- Intern, Coordinator, Chief GED Examiner

@YWCA SEW

- Manager, Director, Senior Program Director

@Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.

- Executive Director



My Shameless Self-Promotion

Created 5.09 HSED Program @SDC

- Cohort based
- Practical Application Reviews
- Short time frame (all or nothing)

Created 5.09 HSED Program at YWCA SEW

- Cohort based, modular, test out options
- Identified as National Best Practice- What Works Cities Initiative Bloomberg Philanthropies
- Workforce Innovation Grant
- RUSD Competency Based Credit Recovery

Co-Authored State of Wisconsin Health Assessment



While Making This Presentation

- Walk through a student's journey through our programs
 - Intake (but that isn't the start of our journey as educators)
 - Testing/ Placement (Bias, but necessary)
 - Classroom Management (events during the journey)
 - Telling the Story of Success or Struggles



Outreach

How to Reach and Engage Adult Learners

- Know Your Community
- What Services it Needs
- Where You Fit



Knowing Your Community

- ☐ **Community Characteristics**
- ☐ **Demographics**
- ☐ **Educational Background**
- ☐ **Economic Factors**
- ☐ **Barriers to Participation**



Why Is This Important for Outreach?

Understanding **who you serve and what they need** helps you:

- Find the right audience
- Choose the right channels
- Communicate in ways that resonate



Where to Find This Information

American Community Survey (ACS)

- **Population Size & Age**
- **Educational Attainment**
- **Race/Ethnicity**
- **Language & English Proficiency**
- **Income & Poverty**
- **Employment Status**
- **Housing & Transportation**



Now What?



Promote What You Do Best



Use Multi-Sector Collaboration

Local City Government,
Resource Providers and Places
Where the Learners Bottleneck



**Ensure the Message is
What is Important to the
Learner**



Real Learner Success



**Leverage Trusted
Relationships**

Peer-to-Peer and Word of Mouth



Assessments and Intake

Why, When and How

80/20 Rule

- A “thing needs to work for 80% if you use it on everyone
 - This should take 20% of your time
- The remaining 20% need individualized services
 - This should take 80% of your time



Assessments

What Are Standardized Assessments?

- Formal, consistent tests used to measure adult learners' skills in reading, writing, math, and sometimes English language proficiency.
- They help programs place learners appropriately and track progress.



Assessments

Why They Matter

1. Time is our real currency
2. Is the stuff your doing working
3. Success is not always measured in a test
 - Shows learner growth over time and program effectiveness.
4. This also helps storytelling
 - Data from assessments often ties to funding and performance metrics.



From Assessments to a Holistic Approach

- **Limitations of Standardized Tests**
 - Standardized assessments have biases and may misrepresent marginalized learners' true abilities.
- **Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Data**
 - Integrating test results with interviews, observations, and goal-setting enriches learner evaluation.
- **Areas to Add Outside of Assessments**
 - Participant Agreement
 - Personalized Education Plan
 - Gather Demographic Information
 - Letter From the Learner



Participant Agreement

Key Points: Rights and Responsibilities

- **Purpose:** Ensures a safe, respectful, and productive learning environment.
- **Core Areas:**
 - **Respect for Everyone:** No offensive language, proper etiquette, report issues.
 - **Academic Expectations:** Complete work with 80%+, meet state and program requirements.
 - **Attendance:** Strict attendance policy; active participation required.
 - **Miscellaneous Rules:** The catch all .
- **Acknowledgment:** Students sign agreement to confirm understanding and compliance.



Why This is Best Practice in Adult Learning

- **Safe Environment:** Clear rules reduce conflict and anxiety.
- **Inclusive:** Promotes respect and equity.
- **Accountability:** Adults thrive with clear expectations.
- **Engagement:** Active participation improves learning.
- **Workplace Prep:** Mirrors professional standards.
- **Integrity:** Protects program quality and funding.



Personal Education Plans

- The form helps educators and students create a Personalized Roadmap for academic success
 - Personal Goals
 - Reason for Taking Classes
 - Establishes Their Expectations for Agency
 - Identifies Barriers
 - Sets Realistic Timelines
 - It Gives Them Individual Attention Before the Journey Fully Begins



Demographics

Why We Gather This Information

- **Name, date of birth, gender**
 - Anchors the student's record
- **Contact and location (phone, email, ZIP)**
 - Let's us follow up, send reminders, and connect to nearby services
- **Language and education background**
 - Prevents frustration and helps us tailor programming
- **Employment status and income range (by household size)**
 - Helps us connect students to the right supports
- **Disability status**
 - Integrates needed supports into the PEP
- *We allow "Prefer not to answer," but collect enough to truly know and serve each student.*



The Importance of Storytelling

Using Narrative to Teach, Motivate, And Connect.



health workforce community

Storytelling as the Thread of Our Work

- Outreach, intake, assessments, agreements, and PEPs all sit on top of one thing
 - Every tool is built around a human story
- This section is about how we honor and use those stories



Outreach: From Data to Neighbors

- Community data and ACS numbers show who is out there
- Stories turn numbers into neighbors
- One learner's story makes the statistics human



Assessments: What the Test Misses

- Standardized tests help, but they have limits and bias
- Scores cannot see the full person
- Stories fill in what the data does not show



Agreements and PEPs: Building a Safe Environment

- Participant agreement creates a consistent, predictable classroom
- Free of distractions, focused on safety and respect
- PEP and demographics help us support learners in and beyond class
- Stories turn boxes and signatures into a living narrative



From Heavy Bricks to a Rebuilt Community

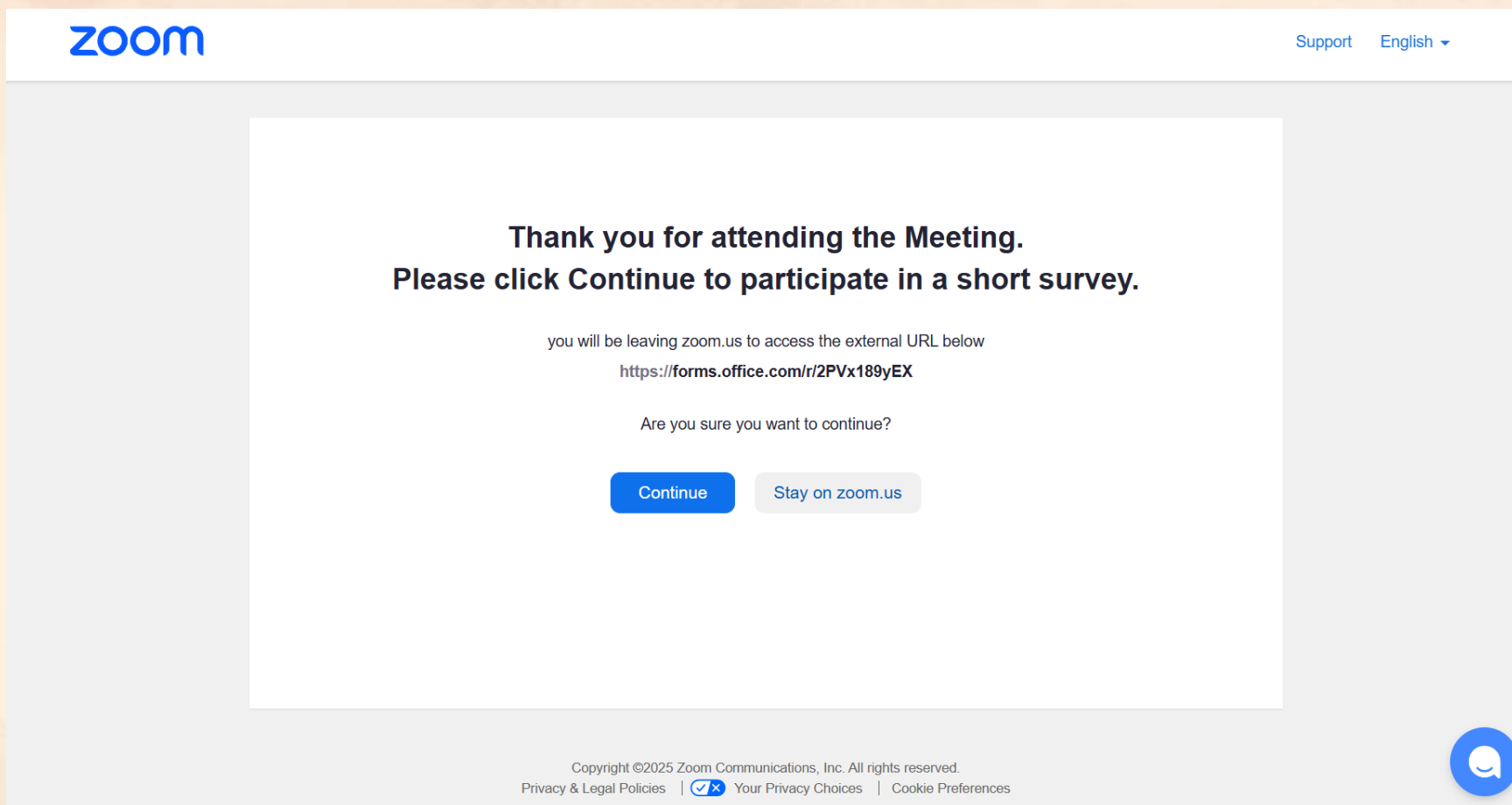
- Each person carries a 'brick' in their chest
- Sharing a story sets one brick down
- Many stories together show the wall of our collective effort
- Bricks rebuild the local economy and community

What I've Learned About Change

- Programs do not change communities, people do
- Tools and tests matter, but stories move hearts
- Stories told with consent and respect attract real investment



Complete our survey, please!



Thank you!

To see our fall conference schedule and register for sessions:

wislit.org/FallConference



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