Making the Career Pathways Journey: The challenges of class and program transitions from learners perspectives

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Presentation Overview
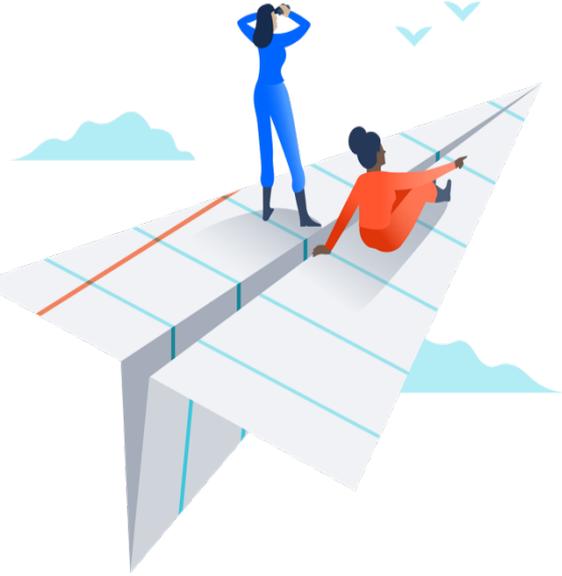
- Defining "Change Points and Transfer Process" and our hypothesis about them

- Overview of two studies and focus of today's presentation

- Change Points: Preliminary Findings

- Transfer Process: Preliminary Findings

- Implications for Practice

- Next Steps

"Change Points"and "Transfer Process" Defined

- Change Points: points in an adult learner's educational trajectory when they must change classes or programs in order to continue to get their needs met.

- Transfer Process: the time after a change point has been reached

- In order to stay en route, students who encounter change points must successfully navigate the transition process from one class/program to another

What do Change Points and Transfer Processes look like?

The Transfer Process in a Career Pathways Approach

Program participation → **Transfer Point** → **Navigating the Transfer**

Enroll in next program or class

Not make it to the next program or class
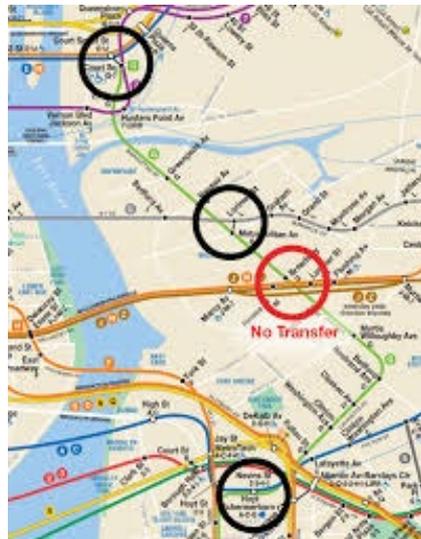
Our Hypothesis:

➢ **Change points** often lead to attrition that is different from dropping out of classes.

➢ This attrition is caused by the need to engage in a **transfer process** between/amongst programs.

➢ This attrition is **different** than when a student drops out of a class and may need different solutions

Step 1: Pilot Study
Understanding Change Points

Research question:
What are the "change points" that students encounter?

Research Design

Preliminary **semi-structured interviews** (on the phone and over email) with **10 adult educators and administrators** from a diverse array of adult programs including those in:

Research Sample
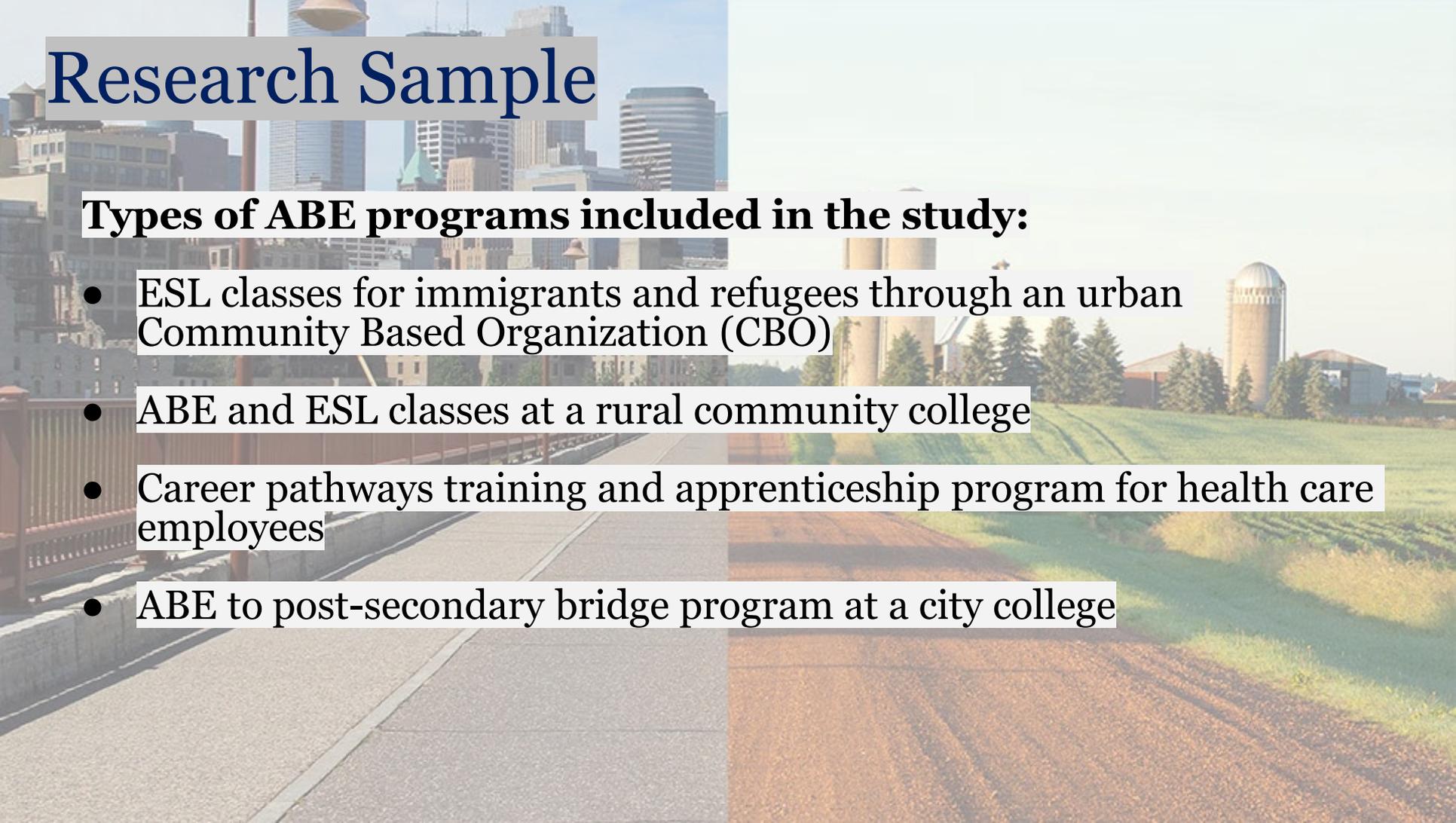
Types of ABE programs included in the study:

- ESL classes for immigrants and refugees through an urban Community Based Organization (CBO)

- ABE and ESL classes at a rural community college

- Career pathways training and apprenticeship program for health care employees

- ABE to post-secondary bridge program at a city college

Findings: What are "change points" for students?

- No appropriate class available at time of enrollment

- Class at another location is more convenient

- Program cannot meet learner need/interest

- Level change

- Student's schedule changes; student moves

- Student goals are not aligned with program services

- Class closes due to low enrollment

- Dismissed from program (e.g., for poor attendance)

What other "change points" have you observed?

Findings: What happens to students after they reach a "change point"?

We do not have the capacity to track students beyond our program

"We don't have a method to track referred students"

We might check on students informally through our network, but "we don't track this data from the program end"

"There is no official tracking process"

"There is little if any record kept of the results of any outside referrals"

"We don't really track our students when they leave, as far as I know"

What happens to students in <u>your </u>program after they reach a change point and get referred to another class or program?

Step 2: Understanding the Transfer Process

Research Questions:

- What happens when students enter the transfer process to change classes/programs because of encountering a "change point"? How often and under what circumstances do students successfully make the change? And what factors contribute failing to make the change?

- What factors influence students' likelihood of successfully traversing a change point and continuing their adult learning trajectory in a new class/program?

Research Design: Participant recruitment

➢ Part 1 Use Philadelphia centralized intake and referral system to recruit learners (Office of Adult Education, MyPlace Campuses)

   ➢ 1st transfer from phone call to intake appointment

   ➢ 2nd transfer from intake to referral

➢ Part 2 Work with OAE partners to identify learners reaching a change point

Research Design: Data Collection

➢ Phase 1: 2 telephone interviews to understand their experiences, decisions, supports, and obstacles as they navigate change points and transfer processes

  ➢ Soon after intake (11 calls completed)

  ➢ Soon after referral (4 calls completed)

➢ Phase 2: 3 telephone interviews to understand their feelings about reaching a transfer point, their experiences navigating the transfer, and what contributed to the transfer outcome

  ➢ After reaching a change point and receiving a referral (0 calls completed)

  ➢ 2-4 weeks after

  ➢ 6-10 weeks after

THEN COVID HAPPENED!!!!
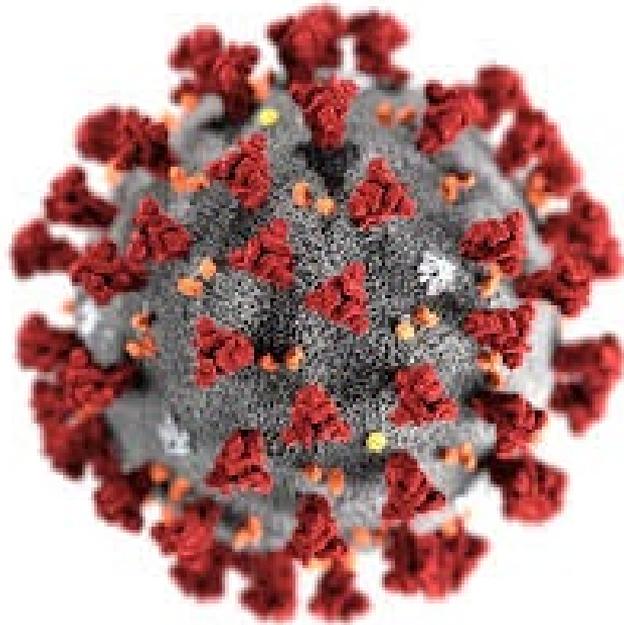
What have we learned so far?

➤ We had many data collection challenges

  ➤ We could not devise a way to contact learners who did not make it through the first transfer point (from phone call to intake)

  ➤ We had significant difficulty contacting those who made it to intake and very little success at doing follow up

  ➤ Most of our respondents were higher level (HSE)

  ➤ Just as we were beginning to plan for Part 2, COVID hit

➤ Commitment level starts out very high and few or no obstacles are anticipated among those who make it to intake

Navigating Change Points and the Transfer Process

- Learners begin with inner drive and a feeling that the timing is right

    "What helped me was the fact that I knew this was the time to do it."

    "I am interested now because I'm getting older, I'm 35, and I felt like it was time fpr my kids and for my family."

- No one complained that getting through the intake process was challenging, but there were several steps and we only talked to those who made it

However…

- When there are multiple steps and an inflexible path from intake through referral, some may get lost or frustrated during the transfer process.

Example 1: Darillyn called the OAE wanting tutoring but they only refer to classes. She was given an appointment anyway, but didn't know that she was going for testing. "She already said she couldn't help me, so why do I need to come back again [for further testing]?" She went back to take another test but she didn't understand why this was necessary. She was supposed to go back today but decided not to go. "It felt like your time was being wasted."

- **Example 2:** After completing the intake process, Jess waited to be contacted by the program she was referred to, but the email didn't come for a while, and when it did, it came late on a Sunday night. Not expecting it then, she didn't see it. "So today [Monday} I called them and let the lady know that they hadn't sent me an email "but then I decided to check my email. I would have never expected it on Sunday because it was supposed to be on Wednesday.
- I was annoyed because I was already supposed to start. They said [in the email] come in on Monday- they gave no time- and said see you tomorrow. I'm confused what to do. I spoke to a woman today, and asked what can I do to start the classes. Told me to come in tomorrow night. 'I said wait I didn't chose night class'. She said it is for the 'get to know each other' but I was never told about this, and she said I had to do this to start classes.
- It looks like its going to be a long process."

Example 3: Yanitza, Jessica

"They referred me to one program and also told me about two others. I called the first one, and they didn't call back. It's the closest one. I could walk. They said they would call me back on Thursday. We'll see what happens."

"I never received an email about when classes started so I still haven't started taking any classes."

VERY Preliminary Implications for Practice

- Explore every change point and transfer process to make sure that the "signage" is clear, that the transfer is as easy as possible, and that there are helpers along the way to guide learners
- Streamline intake and referral procedures as much as possible (what seems simple to you, might not be for learners)
- Make sure every aspect of the process is seamless (including communication and follow-through of partners)
- When students get lost during transfer process, don't assume the "fault" lies with them
- Check to see if learners made it to the next "train"
- Identify mechanisms for bringing learners back into the system who exit it during the transfer process. They may need help that is distinct from those who drop out of class before reaching a change point

Questions and Comments……….

Next steps: Participating in the research

Please contact us if you would like to participate in this study!

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