

## Audio Transcript of Allan Quigley Recording

### Section 4: The Story of Evelyn

Hi.

In my very first week of teaching, I had twelve adult learners in the classroom. Our room was on the upper floor of a High School building in a Northern Saskatchewan town. I arrived there having had only two weeks of training in Regina, mostly about the importance of taking attendance, how to use placement testing, and how the curriculum was organized.

But only eleven of the twelve showed up that first day.

Then, the second day, Evelyn arrived. Late. She came into the room—more exactly she burst into the room, and I welcomed her. She took a desk and introduced herself to the class.

She was a single mother and seeming to be very agitated. She let us know she had a lot of commitments besides what she called, “school.”

Back then having no idea of logical sequencing beyond giving her the books she would need for the course, I started her on the standardized placement test that same afternoon. Well, this is what my training course had basically told me and the others in my training course to do.

I could see she needed to catch up.

I had no idea of anything like logical sequencing. I had nothing like an intake inventory discussed in section six and seen in the appendices, or a flow-through chart starting with a **nurturing phase**, as seen in section six.

The results of her placement test were okay, she was somewhere around grade eight according to the CTBS—the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, which we all used across the province in those days.

But Evelyn seemed disappointed in the results. I assured her she was fine. We had some work to do but she would be fine.

She didn't seem convinced.

Over the rest of that week and into the next, she grew increasingly frustrated. Especially with math. The others would hear her sighing, groaning, muttering about the exercises in the books she had.

Sometimes at coffee break, she would make kind of dismissive jokes about the material she was working on. Irrelevant I guess.

I helped her one-on-one, sitting beside her desk as often as I could, but she was clearly getting more and more frustrated as time went on.

I tried to talk more with her after class, but she always had outside commitments and had to hurry away. She had to pick up her daughter, or get the car serviced, or meet someone.

It was a really cold winter that year. Lots of snow and around -30 below mist days.

On Friday of week two, she burst into the classroom. Really late. Hung her coat up. Clearly exasperated, she told everyone she had left the car running all night so it would be nice and warm in the morning. Then, when she went to pull away that morning, the car was so frozen into the ice that had formed from the exhaust and the heat of the idling car, the back axle broke.

She kind of laughed at the whole thing but, the car was now in the garage. She could hardly concentrate that Friday afternoon. I think now she was weighing her options. Was “school,” as she called it, right for her?

After the weekend, on Monday, Evelyn really burst into the classroom. She threw the door open, plunked the books down on a desk, and announced in a loud voice: “I quit!” Turned and left.

The whole class was stunned, as was I. No one really said anything. The learners talked a bit about what had happened during the coffee break, but then went back to their books.

For my part, I felt terrible. I sat at my desk wondering if should go after her down the hallway? I didn't. She was clearly upset and clearly just wanted to get out of the building.

That evening talking to my wife, I wondered if I should maybe try calling her. I had access to all of the learners' phone numbers. If only I had had access to the intake inventory, as discussed in section six and seen in the appendices, I would have had a better idea of her past, her hopes for the future. Maybe her situation at home.

If I had had access to the flow-through-chart seen in section six, which starts with a nurturing phase, things might have been different. I should not have just started her off with the placement test the same day she arrived. That was not logical sequencing and it wasn't learner centered.

So I sat at my desk wondering if I she try to catch her as she hurried down the hall. If I had had a chance to reflect on something like the “Where I stand” questionnaire seen in section three earlier, I might have had a better role as to what my role was.

So I did nothing. And here I am some fifty years later talking about this.

What would have really helped me back then, and through the years that followed as an adult literacy teacher, then Director of literacy and basic education at a community college in Regina, and later when I was Coordinator for literacy and basic education with the Saskatchewan government...and, honestly, even later as a professor of adult education in the years to follow,

what would have helped me was the motivation formula: VVSE. This has since become my “balance adjuster.” Or maybe I could call it my, “teaching stress reliever.”

You might remember the formula is: **Volition + Value -> Success + Enjoyment.**

Evelyn came into the classroom valuing the program. I know she did. But her life wasn't easy and she became overwhelmed. But things just got worse. The course work became just one more burden. But she did value the program and made an honest attempt to attend and she did try, despite all of the challenges she had.

But what we are calling her volition, just ran out. I think the timing was wrong. Her drive to overcome all of her odds, as other learners have done, just wasn't up to the challenge right then.

Telling us that our programs can ask a lot from learners. More than we often realize. Financial issues, family demands, illnesses, domestic issues...not to mention negative memories of past schooling in many cases. So many things can add up to learners having to really believe our literacy programs are worth the time, effort and personal sacrifices needed to succeed and complete the programs.

But, if we step over to the other side of VVSE, what was my role? If the timing was wrong, why didn't she come back? The course ran all that winter. The timing was apparently never right for Evelyn that winter. Apparently.

The SE side of our VVSE formula balance says we, the practitioners, need to help the learners feel they are having success. Genuine success. And on more levels than the academic work alone—as discussed in relation to the Intake Inventory seen later in this Guide, and throughout this guide, we work with the affective domain. We work with learner feelings, emotions and attitudes; not the least of which is self-efficacy. Meaning, the realization that they can do actually do something they could never do before. They can gain a new belief in themselves. A heightened sense of self-esteem. Not Evelyn.

Evelyn didn't believe she was really succeeding. Could I have done a better job at that? Probably. But I didn't know how.

But, where was enjoyment for Evelyn?

She had a great personality, good sense of humour, definitely not shy. But the program was certainly no fun for Evelyn.

Looking back, my VVSE “balance adjuster” tells me the Volition part of the formula wasn't strong enough for Evelyn at that time; but the S and E on my part—my part of the formula—wasn't strong enough either. I did my best with what I knew at the time, but I sure wish I could go back and do it all again knowing what I know today.

In closing, I hope this anecdote helps you have a better way to understand what is happening when things evidently don't go well.

Success in literacy is a two-part journey. Look at both sides of the formula.

Thanks for listening.