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ABSTRACT

One aspect of the Greece (New York) Central School District's Continuing Education Division is an adult literacy program for students who enter with a reading level below the sixth grade as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) (17 percent of students). Students at this level receive instruction in one of four environments: adult basic education classes at an education center or at an apartment complex, or workplace literacy classes at one of two sites. The average student receives 46 hours of reading instruction per semester (10 weeks), with workplace students receiving 56 hours over 8 weeks. The mean grade-level gain for students after about 50 hours of instruction is approximately 1.8 years, although individuals vary considerably, with those completing a semester usually gaining 2-3 years of growth. Those who stay for a school year or longer can achieve as much as 4 years of growth. Students are taught by a diagnostic-prescriptive model, with continuous monitoring and refinement of students' programs based on current assessment. The most beneficial aspects of this process have been the use of standardized testing and student intake interviews. The program continues to emphasize the diagnostic-prescriptive method and plans to add diagnosis of learning disabilities. (KC)

WHO'S LEARNING TO READ AND HOW DO WE KNOW?

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by

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WHO'S LEARNING TO READ AND HOW DO WE KNOW?

Program Description--The Greece Central School District Continuing Education Division provides comprehensive adult learning services for a suburban community of approximately 90,000 residents. The program also attracts a large number of people from the city of Rochester as well as surrounding communities.

The Continuing Education Division is divided into three departments:

Community Education (serving approximately 20,000 annual registrants);

Funded Programs (serving approximately 1,000 annual registrants; and,

Center for Training and Development (serving over 12 agency and industrial clients).

The Office of Funded Programs is responsible for adult literacy services, citizenship education, and adult career counseling. Students from ages 16 to 70 plus enroll in a variety of programs including:

High School Transition (Alternative High School Equivalency); Citizenship Education; English as a Second Language; Adult Basic Education; Adult High School Equivalency; Job Club; Workplace Literacy; Home Study High School Equivalency; Home Study Citizenship Education; and, GED on TV.

Funding for each program is received in the form of state aid, state and federal grants, and Board of Education allocations.

The teaching staff includes full-time and part-time teachers. The entire teaching staff hold either elementary or secondary certification with backgrounds in reading, mathematics, science, and/or social sciences. The goals of the program include:

a. Access--making instruction available in schools, at work, in community settings or at home;

b. Achievement--enabling adults to move quickly from initial reading and computation levels to levels sufficient to complete GED requirements; and,

c. Opportunities--making vocational training opportunities available either during or after GED preparation.

Our literacy program can be categorized in several ways: workplace, classroom, basic skills; community-based, and immigration/ESL.

1. Who is Learning to Read and How Do We Know?

The focus of this position paper is on students enrolled in our programs who achieve an entry reading level category below the 6th grade as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

Approximately 17% of the students served by the Office of Funded Programs enter with less than a 6th grade reading level. Students at this level receive instruction in one of four environments:

- Adult Basic Education classes at the West Ridge Community Education Center;
- Adult Basic Education classes at the English Village Apartment complex;
- Workplace Literacy classes at the Monroe Developmental Center; and
- Workplace Literacy classes provided for Rochester Products Division of General Motors.

The average Adult Basic Education student receives approximately 46 hours of reading instruction per semester (approximately 10 weeks). The average

workplace literacy student receives approximately 56 hours of reading instruction per 8 week cycle. Statistical data referring to entry reading levels and average gain is summarized below:

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Starting Reading Level Category	Enrollment	Average Gain in Years
0 - 2.9	7	+1.1
3 - 4.9	15	+2.0
5 - 6.9	56	+1.8

WORKPLACE LITERACY PROGRAMS

Starting Reading Level Category	Enrollment	Average Gain in Years
0 - 2.9	28	+1.4
3 - 4.9	31	+1.8
5 - 6.9	28	+2.1

The Workplace Literacy classes are more intensive than regular Adult Basic Education classes. Workplace learners receive instruction 5 days a week for 8 weeks. The Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs serve adults 2 days or nights per week for 10 weeks. ABE programs run for 48 weeks a year with continuous enrollment/registration.

Students are assessed at entry into the program through the use of Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and teacher/counselor interviews with each student. Assessment after entry is ongoing and supports a diagnostic-prescriptive teaching model. Although the mean grade level gain for each student is approximately 1.8 years after approximately 50 hours of instruction, there are no "average" students.

Some adults leave the program after one visit and, therefore, show little or no growth. Other students remain in the program for a school year or longer

and achieve as much as 4 years equivalent growth. Most students who stay in the program for at least a semester demonstrate 2 to 3 years growth in reading scores.

Students who read at less than a 6th grade level usually have learning deficiencies in basic computation skills. Teachers, therefore, divide their time between basic reading instruction and mathematics. The emphasis, however, is on reading and solving math word problems involving whole numbers.

Once a student is reading at a 7th grade level, the instruction in math and other content areas occupies a greater percentage of the student's day. The ultimate outcome for all students in literacy programs is to achieve a passing score on all subtests of the Test of General Educational Development.

2. How Do We Train Teachers to Assess Student Progress?

Teachers new to our program are introduced to methods of student assessment using several concurrent techniques. Initially, we attempt to provide them with opportunities to observe and cooperate with an experienced adult educator in an ongoing class. The experienced teacher aids the new teacher by demonstrating and discussing the diagnostic-prescriptive model that our programs utilize.

Additionally, use of this same diagnostic-prescriptive model is emphasized and encouraged by participation of new teachers in regional workshops dealing with the subject. A video portraying a classroom simulation of the method at work is an especially effective tool. It highlights advantages of using continuous monitoring and refinement of the students' programs based on accurate and current assessments of their progress.

It must also be noted that our teachers, who are all professional educators, have had prior training in student assessment. For this reason, they are able to provide a good deal of self-training by studying and interpreting the various administration guides that accompany the published testing materials.

3. What Has Worked Best in Our Assessment Procedure?

The components of our diagnostic-prescriptive method of student assessment that continue to be most beneficial are the use of standardized testing (most often the TABE) and the student intake interview. However, use of one without the other can result in a totally inadequate assessment of the needs of a particular student.

The standardized test is useful in identifying the existence of a possible learning deficit, but the actual cause of such a deficit is much more difficult to define. Frequently, we have discovered that the apparent deficit is actually the result of the student's inability to perform on the particular test instrument, perhaps because of a vision problem, test "phobia", distractability, or other non-test related phenomenon.

The importance of a non-threatening, informal intake interview cannot be overemphasized. When a valid substandard score is identified, careful discussion of the student's history can often identify such diverse causes as lack of educational opportunity, non-remediated learning disabilities, or health problems. Skilled interviewing often prevents the administration of unnecessary auxiliary testing. It has the further advantage of building rapport and establishing the teacher's true interest in the student as a person.

4. What Hasn't Worked?

In the past, we have utilized tests such as the Metropolitan Achievement Tests and General Education Performance Index. They proved unsatisfactory because of the amount of time required to administer them and also because their content was not sufficiently diagnostic.

Another pitfall we discovered involves the use of standardized reading scores as the only factor in textbook placement. Many adults have built complex coping systems that mask their true comprehension level. Careful initial monitoring of the students in newly assigned materials or the use of criterion referenced tests (e.g., the Brigance Inventory of Essential Skills) has helped us to avoid many misplacements.

6. How Do We Find Out What the Students Want to Accomplish and How Do We Help Them Reach Their Goals?

To answer this question we must emphasize the most direct approach--asking them. Our intake processing form requires us to ask, "What would you like us to help you accomplish?" Students' unique educational desires are incorporated into their prescriptions by the assignment of appropriate materials. Successful completion of such assignments results in goal accomplishment.

7. What Effect Does Information Gained From Assessment Have On Our Program?

Assessment information impacts on all aspects of our program. The types and quantity of materials that are purchased constantly requires adjustment to reflect the assessed needs of our students. In the past, we have hired extra staff members when we have identified too large a group of low functioning students within our classes. Furthermore, the types of special skills we look

for in newly hired teachers often reflect needs established by our assessment methods.

8. What Do You Do To Follow Up On Students?

Truthfully, not a lot. We encourage all our students to notify us of any achievements, but we cannot force them to do so. However, students who remain in our programs for extended periods of time usually develop strong bonds with the teachers. Many will maintain periodic contact, some for years.

Those who drop out are usually contacted by telephone and encouraged to continue. If they choose not to, we usually lose touch.

9. How Do You Link Up With Local Support Groups?

Our program is well known for establishing linkages with other community groups. At the moment we have programs operated in conjunction with: a major local industrial employer, the local law enforcement agency, the county Social Service Department, and a public television station. There is frequent exchange of information, both written and face-to-face, between these agencies and our program's administration.

Furthermore, we utilize the news media as much as possible to spread information about our programs and our successful participants. We also regularly nominate our outstanding students for local, state and national adult education awards. The resultant publicity informs our supporters of our successful efforts, encourages our present students, and often motivates other potential learners to join our programs.

10. What Do You Have Planned For Student Assessment in the Future?

We plan to continue our emphasis on the diagnostic-prescriptive method of instruction. Recently we have sent staff members to workshops focused on the identification of adult learning disabilities and strategies for developing instructional techniques to assist the learning disabled. This training has been a big asset to our total assessment procedure, especially in determining why certain students do not show expected gains. We will also be attempting to expand our ability to identify students who demonstrate difficulty with the higher level cognitive skills (e.g., evaluation or synthesis) since the new GED and many new job skills have greatly increased emphasis on these abilities.