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ADJUSTED STUDY

An Experiment in Self-Instruction

by Robert L. Crane and Marjory Jacobson

It appears that one of the most glaring inconsistencies in education is the recognition of individual differences among students by professional educators who attempt to meet student needs by providing a singular, standard, inflexible program of instruction. While there are exceptions, many school districts design programs for the average child, set rules for the average child, adopt materials for the average child, and employ teachers who are prepared to teach the average child.

What of the youngsters who are not "average"? If their needs are not met at an early age and continually met throughout their formative years in school, their deviation from the norm or average becomes greater and more pronounced. Hence, the deviant child.

This deviance may be evidenced in a number of ways such as his inability to cope with academics due to a lack of skills development, particularly attainment of reading skills. As a result, he is frequently guilty of acting out or disruptive behavior resulting from anger or frustration, of truancy, or of complete withdrawal in an effort to avoid further frustration and failure. Certainly, the very gifted child is often called deviant because he often presents an added challenge to his teachers by his nonconformist attitude.

Educators, parents, and the general public are realizing more and more the need for compensatory programs to meet the needs of students with varying backgrounds and a wide range of academic skills. The Adjusted-Study Program at Webber Junior High School in Saginaw, Michigan, was designed in an effort to meet some of these needs.

A feeling of self-respect and self-

worth is probably one of the most important factors in the success of any student during the early years of his education. Teachers are often unaware of the problems which have contributed to the aggressive behavior or the apathetic withdrawal of many of their students. Certainly, every teacher has known the frustration of trying to teach such youngsters; however, it is important that teachers be mindful of the fact that all youngsters have particular needs if achievement is to result.¹

There is a need in the classroom for teacher recognition and acceptance of the principle that the learning process is not primarily the acquisition of academic skills, but the acquisition of social skills with individual orientation which recognizes an accepted value system. Furthermore, the prime goal of the teacher should be to help each child gain a realistic personal evaluation of himself and attain an emotional adjustment toward a pre-established goal.²

The purpose of the Webber project was to determine whether an experimental Adjusted-Study Program could improve the academic achievement and social behavior of a selected group of junior-high-school students in attendance at Webber Junior High School. The students selected had a history of poor academic achievement, poor attendance, and socially unsatisfactory behavior. During the 1971-1972 school year data were gathered to determine any change in over-all grade-point average by the participating students, any improvement in their rate of referral to the Pupil Personnel Office for disciplinary purposes, any improvement in the attitude of classroom teachers towards problem

students, and any change in attendance patterns. Other data were collected to indicate whether parents of participating students would view the program in a positive way.

Significance and Rationale

Similar to most intermediate schools in an integrated geographical area, Webber Junior High School has a high rate of misbehavior on the part of some students both in the classroom and in areas around the school. Furthermore, it has been shown that almost all of these students are experiencing difficulties in trying to reach minimal standards of academic achievement. In the past, there has been no meaningful program at Webber to help these youngsters to solve their behavioral problems adequately or experience success in their academic efforts. Fortunately, through the efforts of a curriculum committee this experimental Adjusted-Study Program was funded and initiated at Webber during the 1971-1972 school year. It was believed as a result of increased motivation that such a program would raise the level of achievement and help these youngsters to improve their social behavior. There was also the hope that teachers would perceive a more realistic student image and revise their instructional techniques accordingly.

The rationale for this program was based in part on the following theories:

1. Instruction planned especially for the individual, i.e., based on his interests, aptitudes, and rate of learning, will produce greater achievement measured by differences between teacher-made pretests and post-tests.
2. There is an opinion that "success begets success." It seems reasonable to expect that successful students will be more willing to move ahead, to try something new, and to assume greater responsibility than unsuccessful students.
3. The "Hawthorne Effect" will be recognized if students are given

large doses of individual attention and personal services as provided by the Adjusted-Study Program. Research indicates that production is significantly greater for workers who are noticed personally or who innovate as compared with those who lack this personal contact or who follow prescribed job-routines. This is often the case in a regular classroom setting.

Structural Plan of Program

One of the significant innovations of this program was the emphasis on the physical needs of noncommitted learners. As Brogden points out:

First of all, the classroom situation should be of primary concern to the teacher of non-committed learners. This classroom is teacher-created and must be devoid of teacher-induced stress. Relaxation and informality are primary objectives. Because these individuals are often unresponsive, frustrated, nervous, and emotional, special attention and facilities must be available and utilized to bring about positive responses.

Responses from these individuals will occur more readily when they are taken out of the "basement" and moved into the "principal's office." Among these comforts should be cushioned lounge chairs, wall-to-wall carpets, air conditioners, and plenty of room to wander around in.³

Setting — The Adjusted-Study Program was located on the second floor of the school building directly opposite the library. It had been used as an English classroom and its conversion included removing standard student desks and replacing them with six study carrols, two drafting desks, a large table, colorful lounge chairs, a sofa, and several small tables. The room was also completely carpeted and redecorated. The room was made as comfortable and attractive as possible, as an added incentive in hopes of promoting more regular attendance.

Subjects — Students taking part in the Adjusted-Study Program were drawn from the entire population of 1040 students enrolled for the year at Webber. Referrals came from a number of different sources, such as classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, or self-referrals. A form was provided for making referrals to the program and students were not admitted unless the referral was completed and submitted to the screening committee.

The following were considered valid criteria for referral to the program:

1. Continued failure in performing up to minimum standards as evidenced by failing grades in any given subject matter if reasonable evidence exists which indicates that the student has the intellectual capacity to perform at these minimum standards.
2. Continual disruptive behavior resulting in a breakdown of the classroom climate for learning.
3. Emotional withdrawal affecting the climate for learning to the point that communication with the teacher or other members of the class is limited or eliminated.
4. Habitual truancy resulting in academic failure.

The screening committee met on alternate Mondays after school hours and consisted of the Adjusted-Study instructor, the counselor for the referral student, a regular classroom teacher familiar with the student's problems, an administrator, and possibly the school social worker or diagnostician if he was familiar with the student.

All screening committee meetings were chaired by the Assistant Principal for Curriculum Development. Each referral was discussed with regard to his current social and academic problems as well as any previous difficulties encountered. If a majority of the screening committee members was of the opinion that the student would be

helped by the program, he was scheduled into the program two hours per week. He was to leave the class from which he had been referred or the subject giving him the most difficulty. The student was not scheduled into the program on consecutive days, but rather in combinations such as Tuesday and Thursday or Monday and Wednesday.

It was understood that no student referred to the Adjusted-Study Program would be removed from a regularly assigned class on a full-time basis, regardless of the seriousness of his problem. The regular classroom teacher would always retain the major responsibility for the instruction of his students including the entire responsibility for their academic evaluations as far as letter grades on report cards and permanent records were concerned.

A maximum enrollment in the Adjusted-Study Program was set at ten students at any one time by the Board of Education. While no statistical evidence has been found to indicate that ten students is the optimal number to work with, it appeared that the maximum of ten would provide a viable program since the students were to be referred from many different classes representing many different subjects. Each youngster required individual attention with his studies which, in itself, demanded a large part of the instructor's time.

Adjusted-Study Program Methods of Instruction

The regular classroom teacher from whom the student had been referred continued to work with the student in the classroom on a part-time basis. He supported the Adjusted-Study teacher by supplying the class assignments and objectives of the lessons in order to ensure optimum results from the tutoring phase of the program. Once the student entered the Adjusted-Study room with his assignment from the sending teacher, the approach of the program staff was one of "low key" or

"soft-sell." None of the students was pressured or forced to complete his work. They were encouraged to work and offered help when needed. In many cases it was found that the students lacked the basic skills necessary to complete their assignments, particularly in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. In such cases the instructor made an effort to provide work more suited to the student's skills and later conferred with the sending teacher and arranged for credit to be granted for the work achieved.

At times, the student came to the Adjusted-Study room with no desire to work at all. If his negative feelings toward academics were strong, he could feel free to read a magazine, listen to records, talk quietly, or do nothing. He was free to do these things as long as he did not create problems for those students who were attempting to work. Occasions when he was not involved in school work provided opportunities for the instructor or some of the tutors to counsel with the student regarding his feelings about himself and his difficulties. Usually, these periods of limited productivity were temporary and the student would eventually attempt his academic assignments.

Emphasis was placed on the need for the student to learn self-discipline through a plan for him to design and carry out his own activities. Planning effective use of his time, particularly in completing academic responsibilities, was considered a critical phase of the program. Students were encouraged to use earlier segments of each period in the Adjusted-Study room for academic endeavors while the later segments of the period were reserved for "free time" or relaxing activities such as checkers, chess, free reading, or even a walk out-of-doors with one of the tutors. It was hoped that as the year progressed the students would find academic achievement more rewarding and would therefore require less free

time compensation for their efforts.

Program Results

While there were no great secret methods or mysteries about the Adjusted-Study Program, the results in several areas have been very encouraging. Data were gathered to test five different hypotheses.

1. The students in the Adjusted-Study Program will show significant academic improvements by comparing grade point averages on entry and exit marking period report cards, provided the student had taken part in the program for a minimum of ten sessions after entry report card.
2. Students in the Adjusted-Study Program during the 1971-1972 school year will be sent to the Pupil Personnel Office for disciplinary purposes progressively fewer times during the time they are in the program provided they participated in the program a minimum of ten sessions.
3. Students in the Adjusted-Study Program for a minimum of ten sessions will receive proportionally a progressively higher degree of positive comments from their classroom teachers during the time they are in the program.
4. Students participating in the Adjusted-Study Program for a minimum of ten sessions who attended the same school in 1970-1971 will show a significant decrease in the number of absences from school in 1971-1972 as compared with the number of their absences during the same period of the 1970-1971 school year, through the end of the thirtieth week of the school year.
5. At the end of the 1971-1972 school year the majority of the parents of participating students will express a desire to see the program continue.

Following is a brief discussion of the results of the project.

There were 69 students in the program for a long enough time to contribute data. The over-all grade-point average for these students in all of their classes was raised by .15 during their participation in the program. Granted, this was not statistically significant. However, it should be remembered that these were failing students whose only exposure to the program was for two hours each week. Probably their teachers, other than the referral teacher, were not even aware of the fact that they were receiving added support services.

Data collected to determine whether the rate of student referrals to the pupil personnel office for disciplinary purposes was reduced indicated that there was improvement on the part of the participating students in this area. The improvement was slight, to be sure, but, nevertheless, there was an improvement of approximately one less referral to the office per pupil per week after a minimum of ten weeks in the program.

To measure change regarding teacher attitude toward the participating students, an instrument of weighted positive and negative comments was completed by teachers at regular intervals. Results showed a positive change from the initial mean which described improvement of relations between the teacher and the student. Although these results were not statistically significant, an analysis of the data revealed improvement on the part of each of the students.

There was one area of the program that produced no measurable improvement. In fact, with respect to patterns of school attendance the participating students, on the average, gave evidence of a higher rate of absenteeism and tardiness while in the program. Although there is no evidence to indicate this, it was assumed that the absenteeism occurred on the days when the students were scheduled in their regular classrooms and not on the days they

were scheduled in the Adjusted-Study room.

Finally, near the end of the year the parents of the participating students completed a questionnaire expressing their opinion of the program. Analysis of the data pointed out that they were overwhelmingly in favor of the program. Eighty-five per cent of the parents responding expressed the view that the program should continue.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Adjusted-Study Program proved successful to some degree in confirming four of the stated hypotheses and it failed significantly to confirm one hypothesis. While attendance patterns worsened, there was improvement in grade-point averages, rates of referral to the pupil personnel office, and teacher attitude toward deviant students. In addition, parent attitudes toward the program was very positive. It should also be noted that there were intrinsic values resulting from the program that were not measured. Students knew they had "somewhere to turn" if they felt the need, regardless of the scope of their problem. Teachers also expressed the same feeling that students were more open and more willing to approach the faculty and administration.

Other advantages of the program were more practical in nature. One advantage was to offer relief to teachers and the other students from the difficulties created by the very deviant youngster for at least two hours each week while he is receiving extra help in the Adjusted-Study Program. Another advantage of a program of this type is that it was relatively inexpensive. While it did involve the salary of one teacher and required an available classroom, it also permitted services to well over a hundred students by utilizing a part-time schedule in the program. It also provided an excellent opportunity for parent involvement as well as the opportunity to obtain the

services of community volunteers who helped out as tutors.

It was recommended that there should be further experiments in programs of this type. The Adjusted-Study program design might replace traditional remediation classes, such as reading or mathematics, and could also be applied to areas like speech correction, student support services, and consulting services in subject-matter fields. In such programs deviant behavior on the part of the student would not necessarily be a factor relating to achievement.

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