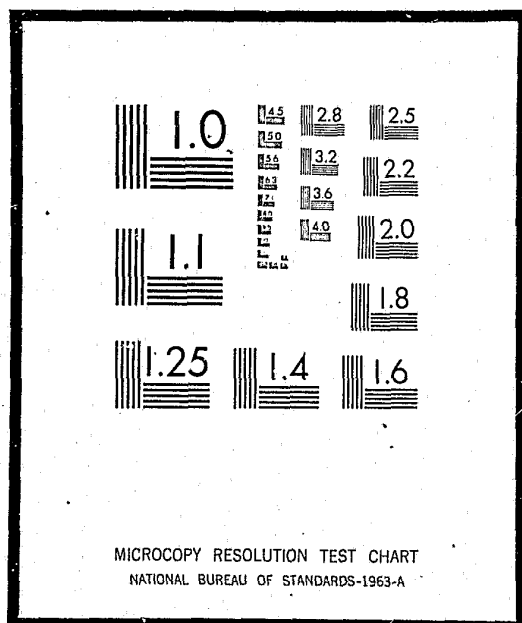


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Developing Curriculum Materials for Adults in County Prisons

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THROUGH a grant from the Pennsylvania Governor's Justice Commission, we were recently given the opportunity to develop an English Curriculum¹ for an Adult Basic Education Program (ABE) in county prisons. Our final product consisted of 20 planned group lessons, a multimedia kit for each lesson, an individualized reading program, and an accompanying teacher's guide. In addition we evaluated this program by using the ABE students in one county prison as the experimental group and those in another county prison as the control group.

Because of the highly transient nature of county prison populations (with short sentences, unsentenced, or awaiting trial) we found it to be nearly impossible to use regular statistical measures to evaluate our curriculum. The N for both groups decreased from about 60 at the start of the program to about 15 at the end, although approximately 200 inmates took part in at least one session during the experimental period. This high attrition rate had nothing to do with the nature of our program. It was just that by the end of the term all but about 15 students had either been released from the prison or had been sent to other institutions. Thus, it was deemed statistically unwise to draw precise conclusions from the data we derived. A similar situation would likely be encountered in attempting to evaluate formally any education program with a highly transient population.

But this phenomenon should not discourage the development of ABE and similar adult educational materials and programs for institutionalized adults. Indeed, prison inmates need more challenging learning materials than now exist in many cases. Many prisoners have great personal problems and frequently are so involved in them that they are not motivated to enroll in educational programs. As professional educators it was in the area of motivation that we became most concerned as we were developing the curriculum,

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field testing it, observing inmate reaction, as well as in our work with prisoners and prison officials. In the course of these experiences we feel we have uncovered several key factors that will motivate court-committed students to want to learn. We believe these factors to be of critical importance in developing specialized adult oriented curriculum materials and in teaching them. Perhaps if these key ingredients were consciously "built into" such materials during the development stage, statistical evaluation would be of less importance. Without the presence of these key factors we believe any materials will continue to have limited validity.

In the remainder of this article we shall suggest those key factors that we consider essential in developing materials for court-committed adults.

I. EDUCATIONAL FACTORS

Commonalities Relating to Students

- (1) Challenge students by using techniques and materials that will appeal to adults.
- (2) Keep students' interest by making lessons fast-paced that deal with relevant, adult topics.
- (3) Because attention spans are often short, provide for a wide variety of activities that offer a frequent change of pace.
- (4) Encourage learning in order that each student can enjoy success from every learning situation.
- (5) Provide for immediate feedback of answers where possible or for immediate discussion following an activity.
- (6) Allow students to participate actively; they should be "doers," not just "absorbers."
- (7) Provide opportunity for students to practice skills in a functional, non-drill setting. For example, letters should be written for a real purpose; poetry selections should focus upon feelings that inmates might possess.

¹ Howard E. Blake and Duane H. Sackett, *Curriculum for Improving Communications Skills (CIGS)*, Pennsylvania Governor's Justice Commission, Southeast Regional Council, Media, Pa., 1972. 266 pp.

Commonalities Relating to Content, Organization, and Approach

(1) Develop materials in terms of specific cognitive and affective objectives, the latter dealing strongly with self-image building emphasis.

(2) Make suggestions for presenting the materials to students of different ability levels. For example, a lesson which focuses upon reading and understanding the newspaper should contain suggestions that will appeal to those who read at the third grade level as well as those who read at the eighth grade level.

(3) Design materials not only for large group instruction but also for small groups, peer teaching, and individualized teaching.

(4) Make extensive use of educational media approaches and materials which provide indepth experiences in visual and auditory literacy.

(5) Make use of gaming and other creative and innovative devices that motivate learning.

(6) Write materials with the thought in mind that many ABE teachers also hold a full-time position elsewhere, leaving little time for preparation, and that some of them are not trained as teachers. Therefore, the instructions should be explicit and sometimes more extensive than the professionally trained teacher needs. In most cases a sample copy of exercises, diagrams, drawings, or such to be used in the lesson should be included. In any case, the thoroughness with which the lessons are explained should save the busy ABE teacher countless hours of preparation and should assure him greater confidence in his teaching as well as improve the quality of instruction.

(7) Write materials so that ordinary educational media equipment (16mm. projectors, slide projectors, tape recorders, overhead projectors, etc.) and consumable instructional materials are available. No special equipment should be called for and the instructional materials should be reasonably inexpensive.

(8) Since the materials are developed for use with highly transient populations, students should be able to pursue the entire curriculum or a part of it, depending upon whether they are released before completing it or whether they are motivated to attend each session. Thus, given lessons should each be mutually exclusive in themselves; therefore they need not be arranged in a given sequence. Consequently, the student should be able to benefit from the lessons, and some of the objectives of the curriculum may be reached,

whether he participates 1 week or 20, although certainly the more lessons he pursues the more he will learn and the more nearly the chance the curriculum will achieve its objectives.

Factors for Teachers To Consider

(1) The materials should be designed primarily to be nonlecture, student- not teacher-centered. Every effort should be made to keep this philosophy in mind. Techniques such as these should be utilized frequently when conducting class sessions:

(a) Divide the class into small groups as often as possible.

(b) Offer individualized instruction frequently.

(c) Make use of peer teaching wherever students have the ability to help each other.

(d) Make use of the inductive approach, i.e., ask questions that get students to discover answers instead of telling the answers out right.

(e) Ask questions that require more than a one- or two-word answer. Use a number of questions that begin with *why* and *how* rather than *who*, *what*, and *where*.

(f) Plan for discussion to take place because discussion makes a class livelier.

(g) Recognize progress and encourage students to improve; both oral and written comments are helpful.

(2) Teachers should become familiar with the entire curriculum before teaching any of the lessons. Learn the thrust and the spirit of the entire program.

(3) The materials should be intended as a resource to the teacher who should feel free to add, delete, or adapt any of the suggested activities or questions that will take best advantage of his or her background and interests and those of their students, the amount of time available, and the availability of equipment and materials. The teacher is in the best position at a given moment to judge and select suggestions that will help students learn. They should not be bound by the planned lesson; instead it should be used as a guide.

(4) Before teaching a lesson study it carefully far enough in advance to order materials, make duplicate copies, and get supplies and equipment ready.

(5) Make substitution for suggested materials that violate local regulations. For example, prisoners may not be allowed to use scissors as recommended in certain lessons, in some prisons.

(6) Remember that the materials provide func-

tional situations in which students may practice skills. Seize every opportunity to enable students to use these skills. Many times an oral activity in a lesson may be converted into a writing activity, or vice versa, to give students the most worthwhile experience. Have students read nearly everything that is written—words and sentences on the board, on duplicated copies, in books used in class, and papers they themselves write. Too much writing can be tiring and boring for students.

(7) The lessons should be written so that students will continuously be successful. Answers that are wrong should be corrected in an encouraging and accepting manner. Most of the activities should be open-ended, allowing for much discussion and differences of opinion.

(8) Relate the content of any lesson, where possible, to any current event that is known to the students.

(9) Show the relationship between the lessons, if any. Remind them that "we did something like this in the lesson on ____" or that "we will learn more about this in the lesson on ____."

(10) Use the chalkboard as much as possible. Everything written on it provides good reading practice for students; call on them to read it back when appropriate.

(11) The materials should not be directed at any one ethnic or minority group. If the students in any classes are predominantly of a particular minority group, where feasible, substitute reading selections, poetry, music, art or other materials that are endemic to that group.

II. FACTORS IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIALS

Besides these educational factors there are also nonacademic factors which we have learned about correctional institutions themselves which are of overriding importance and often are in direct conflict with the educational considerations. Whenever such a situation arises, the potential of any materials prepared for these institutions is often negated. Knowledge of conditions in a given correctional institution are essential in the development of materials because there are many factors that influence whether the materials that have been developed for the institution will or will not be effective or can in fact be at all implemented. Such factors as these need to be recognized.

Sociological and Psychological Factors

The values and attitudes of persons in authority positions largely determine what the educational program will be like. Whether the institution is considered a place for punishment or for rehabilitation will influence the attitudes and values of the governing officials of the institution, the correctional officers, the prisoners, and the instructors. The availability of resource volunteers and paid professionals (Alcoholics Anonymous, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Drug Rehabilitation, Concerned Citizens Council, Legal Aid Society, and volunteer tutors among college students and businessmen) will be dependent upon this attitude. Political interests might also influence the program, for example, correctional officers might be hired through patronage rather than through Civil Service.

The warden and correctional officers are the prime effectors of prisoner attitudes. The values they place upon prison rehabilitation and education will determine the success of the prison educational program. Is the warden's attitude toward the education program positive? If so, will this attitude filter down through the chain of command? Will the correctional officers encourage the prisoners to attend class? Do the warden and correctional officers express a personal interest in the prisoners? Do prison officials verify that the prisoner's academic record appears in his personnel record?

Not only prison officials but teachers, too, have a strong influence upon the educational program. The teacher must truly be interested in rehabilitating the prisoners. "Do-gooders" and the emotionally uninvolved will not reach the student effectively, no matter what their academic qualifications. Students easily identify and reject those with such attitudes and values.

These collective attitudes filter down to the prisoner, already burdened with his problems. He is forced to adjust to these values and attitudes. These, coupled with his own nonadjustive behavior, creates a complex situation in establishing the program.

The Prison Environment

The location of the prison will have a marked effect on the program in many areas. A prison in or near an urban center will likely have a more sophisticated inmate population than one in a more rural area. A mixed urban-suburban prison

population will generate more conflict with the more sophisticated students taking over more of the leadership roles in the classroom.

The availability of transportation to a prison will effect the number and quality of teacher applicants as well as the number of ancillary personnel and the amount of resource materials available. As an example, with a prison located in a non-urban area, the part-time teaching staff must often travel by auto or long bus rides, if available. The fatigue factor on the part of the staff considerably influences the manner in which they teach. In the city the teaching staff will have a greater choice of transportation and easier access to resource materials and libraries. The remoteness of a county prison or location of a city prison in a depressed area (e.g., high crime rate) may seriously limit the availability of ancillary resource personnel and guest speakers.

Work-release programs for prisoners, such as working in factories, on farms, and other work programs, will reduce the school population because of work schedules that may conflict with school hours and student fatigue that results from this activity. Remoteness from population centers and/or the proximity of an economically depressed area, while increasing student attendance rates, might affect the incentive for motivating the student to learn.

The type of facility in which the program is conducted will determine the length of class, the type of class structure, and the amount of individualized instruction, including homework. Obviously, an un-air-conditioned classroom near the steam boiler in the summer will not encourage learning nor teaching. A well-lighted and ventilated classroom of adequate size contributes to optimum learning. Other factors that influence the program are age, composition, and layout of the prison; heating; condition of and access to the prison library; the size and availability of desks, tables, and storage spaces; funds available; number of instructors to be hired and their availability; number of classrooms; quantity of instructional materials; number of nights classroom and students are available; number of students to be taught; the number of guards; and the availability of teacher aides.

Reward System

The concept of student motivation is a most important factor affecting the success of any prison program. Motivators through various re-

wards should be built into the program as well as reinforced with added incentives for successful student completion of the curriculum.

Such procedures as these should be taken into account in establishing the reward system:

(1) The first person a prisoner should see upon entering the prison is the admitting correctional officer, who should, in a positive manner, inform the prisoner that there is an educational program.

(2) The first person the student should meet in the academic program should be the tester/evaluator. This person must motivate the prisoner to participate in the educational program as well as use his counseling skills in creating a strong rapport for future counseling.

(3) Within a few days after entering prison, the prisoner should receive a brochure further informing him about the educational program. He should sign it, indicating his acceptance or refusal to better himself by entering the program. The affidavit, coupled with any further progress reports, should be made part of the prisoner's permanent prison record and should be used by the court in release considerations.

(4) In a well-balanced program, the student will not only gain intellectual achievement, but should enjoy the presence of his friends, have the opportunity to improve his social image and self-concept, and be exposed to materials (paper, pencils, books, handouts, films, music, etc.) and individualized instruction. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the teacher must constantly reinforce the motivators and teach in such a way as to keep students interested.

(5) Peer recognition of progress can be gained through assembly programs and publicity releases (prison bulletin board and newspaper), awards for special achievement, and the awarding of diplomas at the completion of the program.

(6) An attendance record should be displayed in every classroom showing the names of students who attend each lesson. A "check-in" board can be made in which the name of each person in the program is listed. Upon arrival at class each student checks in by placing a symbol beside his name. This system will supply a record of class attendance for each lesson as well as for the entire program. Seeing their names displayed considerably encourages students to attend regularly.

(7) A system should be worked out for giving tangible rewards for achievement—for example, script that can be exchanged at the commissary. Large amounts need not be given; recognition is

the important aspect. Script of varying amounts might be given for such achievements as the following: Completion of all lessons; for every 5 weeks of consecutive attendance; perfect score on an exercise; "Scholar of the Night." The reward system should be explained to the students and posted in the classroom. The teacher should avoid making the rewards too competitive; give out the script liberally but honestly to those who deserve it. Other means besides script could be provided—special privileges, prizes, books, or using successful students as aides.

(8) Refreshments (coffee, cold drinks, and/or pastries) should be served during the break period. These are also considered a key component in the reward system.

Scheduling

Whether individualized or group instruction, or a combination of the two, is considered to be the most effective means, many problems will exist in scheduling a time block that will encourage and permit maximum attendance. Such variables as these must be taken into account:

(1) The work schedules of the majority of the students according to seasonal and annual occupations for which they qualify (farming, lumbering, canneries, etc.).

(2) The prison schedule of activities, such as times for meals, exercise, social and sports events, and lock-up (roll call lights out), TV programs that might compete with the school program (Monday night football, Flip Wilson Show, Manix, etc.).

If the program is to be operated in the evening, nonprime time TV hours are best for high student attendance rates. Classes held from 6 to 9 p.m. with a 20-minute break in the middle seem most effective. This scheme allows the prisoners to view a 9 o'clock movie or sports event if they wish.

Because of short attention spans, activities centering upon one theme can be effective only for about 90 minutes. If the ABE session is 3 hours in length, which is typical, 90 minutes might be spent in a group lesson conducted as described in this article; 90 minutes might be spent on an individualized learning program, perhaps in a learning laboratory, with a break between the two sessions. An additional alternative would be for

the class to rotate to another teacher in another ABE subject after the break, picking up the part missed at the following session.

Rules

A minimum of rules should be established. Some helpful regulations are:

(1) No prisoner can be admitted to class unless he has been tested and accepted into the program by the counselor, and officially placed in a scheduled class.

(2) All students (and teachers) must be in class on time.

(3) No disruptive behavior is allowed in any school facility, including unnecessary loud talking and inattentiveness in class. The teacher should not be forced to call for a correctional officer as this might ruin his rapport with the class.

Classroom Aids

The presence of a classroom aide will considerably enhance the curriculum. While a curriculum can be operated without an aide, they add an additional dimension to the program.

Aides may be hired or volunteers obtained through a local educational institution, the community, or from among the prisoners. The aide's duties might include filing forms, keeping school facilities neat and clean, the preparation of teaching materials needed (typing, reproduction, setting up projector, etc.), keeping records of student progress, tutoring individuals and small groups, assisting with the teaching of lessons, and marking papers.

Conclusion

Developing curriculum materials for correctional institutions is very much like developing curriculum materials for any other educational institution. Yet these institutions and the population they serve often possess a uniqueness of which the curriculum designer must be aware if the materials that are developed are to have long-lasting and motivating effects on the learners. Hopefully, the key factors we have indicated will further enhance effective development of such adult educational materials and, concomitantly, provide optimum learning.

THE potential daily student population in correctional institutions is estimated at about 250,000.—SYLVIA G. MCCOLLUM

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