

## **Juvenile Probation Program**

The Director of the Juvenile Probation Department presented us an opportunity to test the Objective Diagnostic Prescriptive Program with a totally different population. He had heard of our Lincoln School Project and wanted us to develop a program to help the young men that were out of jail and on probation to read.

The following is an abstract of the Objective Diagnostic Prescription Juvenile Probation Project

Judges had granted probation instead of jail time to a great many of the young men who had been convicted of some crime. The judicial system was trying to help the young men to be law-abiding citizens. The problem was that most of the probationers were not in school and had very limited ability to read and even do simple arithmetic. Many of them had been expelled from schools much earlier. The Director of the Juvenile Agency contacted Dr. Strong and asked him if he thought that his program could help the young men learn to read or improve their reading skills and maybe help them with their math?

The young men were scattered over metropolitan area of Houston and few had cars or transportation. Also the classes had to be in the evenings as the young men worked during the day. Other restrictions were The Director indicated that the Juvenile system couldn't furnish space for the classes and that that the Program would be paid so much for each student and

the pay would be based on the student achievement. It was no achievement no pay, which I thought was a good idea.

Since most of the individuals had limited transportation the classes would have to be held in several locations. In addition, the teachers that I wanted would only be free in the evenings. It was further decided that about 60 individuals per six weeks period could enter the program. After analyzing the information I figured that six centers could be established with each center servicing approximately 10 individuals.

I contacted several teachers that I had trained and who had worked with me to see if they were interested. Then through my contacts, I found schools and businesses that would furnish us space to meet. Now that I knew I could have the teachers and meeting spaces I decided that it would be a good opportunity to test the instructional model that had been developed in the Teacher Development Program. I decided to accept the task for two years

Under the agreement or regulations of the juvenile probation department, the probationers were required to meet with us for the first meeting. After that it was up to the program to convince them to continue. In our first meeting with the probationers we did an intensive diagnostic analysis of their reading and math skills. I then met with each individual and went over the findings. The individuals' reading ability ranged from 2nd grade level to 5th grade level. The probationers ranged in age from 13 to 18.

At the conference I asked the individual if they were satisfied with their reading ability. Every one of them said, "NO". Then I asked them if they would like to improve their ability? Every one said, "Yes". So I explained what the program was and what their obligation would be. I also indicated that attending the program was their decision and they were free to drop out any time they felt it wasn't worth their time and effort. In the two years that the program was operational we only had 2 students to drop out and only 1 that we expelled because of discipline problems.

As stated earlier the program was funded and authorized on the achievement of probationers' ability to improve their reading skills. The Juvenile Department monitored the testings. The fact the program continued for two years indicated it was successful in improving the reading skills of individuals participating in the program. All of the participants improved their ability to read. The range of growth was from 1 to 5 grade levels. Remember each probationer, except one, only had six weeks of instructional service. The one exception illustrates some important facts about the program. The instructor of this student came to me and asked if the student could attend another session as he had completed his six weeks. She said that he was making excellent progress and had asked her to let him attend the next session. I looked up the personal and academic records of the student. I found out that he had been reading at a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level, was 16 years of age and had been expelled from 2 different schools for discipline problems. When I discussed his behavior with his instructor she told me that she had never had any problems with him, in fact she said

that he was a model student. I then had a conference with the young man and asked him why he wanted to attend another session. He said, "I am learning to read and I want to learn more." Then he said, "Dr. Strong, when I entered the program I was reading like a second grader and now I am reading at almost a fifth grade level, you all have been honest with me and you are really interested in helping me learn." He then added, "I can see that for the first time in my life I can and am learning." Then I asked him why he had so many discipline problems in school and why he had been expelled from two of them? He looked me straight in the eye and said, "Dr. Strong, how would you like to go into a class where you knew that you couldn't understand the material or do the work and everyone in the class knew you couldn't. The teacher would call on me and I would have to say I don't know. On every test I would get an "F". This would go on day after day with no hope of it getting better. The only way out was to get kicked out." After the conference I went to the director of the juvenile department to see if there would be any problem with allowing the young man to attend another session. He informed me that the regulations only allowed funding for an individual for six weeks. Since part of our funding was based upon the number of students I could see the director's situation. So I then asked him if he had any objections if we allowed the young man to continue and not put him on our roster or charge for the service. The instructor and I had discussed and had agreed on this arrangement earlier. He said that he saw no reason why we couldn't do it. At the end of the second six weeks I checked the young man's progress. The instructor

showed me his final reading test results. The young man was reading at almost the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level. While this young man was an outstanding example of results of the program, the post tests indicated that the average students' growth in reading during the six weeks improved by 2 to 4 grade levels. Another unanticipated result of the program was the lack of discipline and attendance problems. It indicated that many classroom behavioral and attendance problems would be prevented if the program allowed every student to feel that they were learning and making progress. That is the advantage of programs like ODP. Programs are tailored to fit the learner and progress is determined on the student's own achievement not how he compares with some norm. There is no question about if this type program could be done with a typical class of students. The only question is why isn't it being done?