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CHIPOLA'S DROP INS

Mertice B. Ringer

CHIPOLA JUNIOR COLLEGE
MARIANNA, FLORIDA

Janice is a personable young woman of nineteen, a high school graduate with a high school placement score of 73. She is not a candidate for enrollment in local universities. In fact, her prospects for success at any college are dim.

Johnny is a bright young man who was a big success in the extracurricular life of his school, but his lengthy string of D's hardly recommends him to college admission officials.

Marcus, a Negro, received fair grades in high school, but a college aptitude test revealed scores so low in reading and mathematics that success in these fields would be highly improbable, if not impossible.

Mary is thirty-four, a housewife and the mother of two. She finished high school sixteen years ago and now wants to attend college.

These individuals and others like them who are presently enrolled at Chipola Junior College participated in a six-weeks summer experimental program for students needing special instruction. With very little research available as a guide to the establishment of a remedial program, the Chipola staff wanted more firsthand experience in the teaching of the academically handicapped before rushing into a full schedule of remedial instruction during a regular session. The ground rules included automatic admission to Chipola Junior College for those students performing satisfactorily in the six-weeks institute, regardless of high school grades or test scores. The only qualifications for admission to the program were good health and a high school diploma. The institute was especially recommended for those graduates with test scores of less than 150.* The plan was to work with people who might otherwise be denied college admission.

The doors finally opened to thirty-six students in a Guided Studies Program in reading, English, and mathematics. Only one withdrew and thirty-five of the thirty-six students completed the six-weeks term. Thirty-one were advised of eligibility to enroll as regular students for the fall semester. Twenty-six Guided Studies students actually enrolled at Chipola, two in other colleges, one in business school, and two accepted jobs.

* The range of scores is 1-500. Florida's state universities require a qualifying score of 325 on the test for admission.

MATERIALS USED AND CLASS STRUCTURE

We chose a variety of materials to fit the needs of each student. We used the Diagnostic Reading Test, Basic Skills in Arithmetic Test, supplemented by elementary algebra problems added by the mathematics teacher, and the STEP Writing Test, Form A. On the basis of the test results, the classes were divided as nearly as possible into ability groupings.

In mathematics, there were two texts: *Basic Skills in Mathematics* and *Arithmetic: A College Approach*. One section, the lower one-third, used *Basic Skills*. The other two sections used *Arithmetic*. In addition to those texts, programmed materials in algebra, published by Britannica, were available to enable the student to progress as far as he could beyond his text.

English classes also used two books. Each student bought *The Magnetic Structure of the English Language* and *Fundamentals of English*. Additional instruction was provided through the use of hand-out materials covering a wide range of difficulty levels. Interest in spoken words was stimulated by class sessions on diction, using master tapes and tape recorders.

The basic text in reading was *A New Approach to College Reading*. The topics suggested for discussion and theme papers at the end of each selection were closely correlated with the English classes. Supplementary readings from *Efficient Reading*, the *Word Clue Books*, recorded instruction in vocabulary skills developed by Bergen Evans, and numerous newspaper and magazine articles were used. Study skills instruction was woven in and was geared to the type of reading being done and the stated purpose for reading.

The students were asked to stay on campus a minimum of four hours each day. Each of the three classes lasted for one hour. The fourth hour was utilized for meetings of the entire group when necessary, for individual instruction, and for counseling appointments with the guidance staff of the college.

“What is so unusual about Chipola’s Program?” one may ask. Actually nothing is unusual about a junior college that offers remedial work for poor students, but from what we could determine from inquiries of other schools, the comparison stops there. Chipola’s very meager entrance requirement is a total score of 100 or more on the high school placement test. Twenty-four of the twenty-six who enrolled for the regular term failed to make 100 on these tests. Research has shown that only about ten percent of such people normally perform satisfactorily in college. Not so with our group. An analysis of

first semester grades indicates that sixteen students are doing satisfactory work and will be retained the second semester. Ten of the sixteen have better than a two point average. Six of the twenty-six students are being retained on probation. Another unusual characteristic of our group is that of the twenty-six students who enrolled, twenty-six remained through the first semester. Their staying power was astonishing. Records show that about five to ten percent of all students withdraw prior to the end of the first semester and that those who do so usually come from the group with the lowest test scores.

The next question is, "What happened during the six weeks which might account for the high percentage of success and the high retention rate?" Those of us who worked with the program are not sure about everything that happened, but the following aspects of the program appear to have significance.

1. We kept the group together. They knew each other and had a working, friendly relationship with three full-time instructors.
2. The classes were small with a maximum enrollment of thirteen. Each instructor had time to make the student's learning a matter of his personal concern.
3. Every effort was made to provide each student with tasks that he could successfully do. Guided by the promise that everybody needs to succeed at something, we tried to capitalize on showing the rewards of success.
4. We chose a faculty who are convinced that students of low achievement are worth saving. This point deserves every consideration. Some very fine teachers do not like to teach remedial classes. Even a master teacher should be avoided unless he is convinced of the value of his task.
5. We concentrated on a few basic skills and avoided trying to cover too much ground. We felt the learning of a few things well would serve the student better than a smattering of many things.
6. We used a textbook for each class, primarily for its psychological impact on the students. They seemed to feel the need of owning a book in which they had regular assignments. In the classroom all teachers supplemented the texts with recordings, film strips, and outside reading.
7. All students retained one of the three institute instructors as a counselor for the regular session. We feel the familiarity already established has been beneficial.

It is still too early to say what the final benefit of this program will be. The administration and the teaching staff are convinced that the

program is worthwhile. We hope to try again with another group, and the staff is already looking forward to improving much of the instruction. We are asking the students themselves what they have found most helpful and what other subjects they wish we had covered. The need for a few changes is becoming evident. Even though we tried to develop specific skills, we want to tailor the English instruction even more to prepare students for passing freshman English as it is taught here. We hope to add an opportunity for each student to express himself without fear of correction so that at least one paper each week will be graded on content alone. More attention will be given to the student's ability to express his ideas in an orderly fashion and less effort expended on the why of proper grammatical construction. Programmed texts will be provided to aid students with basic grammar and punctuation.

We have realized our need for a better measuring instrument to determine the grouping ability in mathematics. Also, something new to us in computer instruction will be added. There will be ten student stations at Chipola Junior College, connected with the computer at the state university, seventy miles away. Our own mathematics teacher will program the computer with a tailor-made course of study for our students.

The reading program will give more emphasis to vocabulary instruction. A vocabulary series based on words with a high frequency of usage in the general education courses of the college is in preparation by the reading teacher and will be ready for use with the next group. We have no idea what effect these changes will have, but on the basis of our total experiences, we hope to place preparatory courses in our regular curriculum in order to provide an opportunity, at least, for all students who wish to attempt college.

None of the things we have done are really new. Perhaps the key to such success as we are enjoying with our current group of students is the employment of known factors with an abundance of dedication on the part of the teaching staff and the unflagging interest of concerned administrators.