Hollywood Education and Literacy Project

Introduction

The following report describes the application of Study Technology in an inner-city community setting in Hollywood, California, known as the Hollywood Education and Literacy Project (H.E.L.P.). The program assists school age and adult students by helping them take charge of their own learning process and self-correct as they encounter learning difficulties.

Students are illiterate or semi-literate when they come into this program. They may be able to identify words on a page or with difficulty be able to align letters into words, but are not able to comprehend the words they read. They have not made the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". This deficiency in ability to comprehend and apply what they read results in an ever widening achievement gap that puts school-age students at risk of school failure and drop-out and adults at risk of being unemployable.

Approximately seventy-five percent of program participants come from local area public schools. Some have dropped out of school or are in alternative schools/programs and are referred by other community organizations and agencies. The academic content addressed in the program is comparable to that found in the public school curriculum. About one quarter of the participants are adults, who come into contact with the program either through children in their family participating or by simply walking into the center to get help with their literacy problems. The ethnic composition is largely Hispanic, mixed with Caucasian, Asian, African-American and Other.

Study Technology

The success and impact of HELP derives from its reliance on pedagogy known as Study Technology. The term uses the word "technology" in its original sense, meaning "the application of an art or science" rather than referring to the use of computers in the classroom. Study Technology is, therefore, a method of application of specialized academic skills and principles that provide the student with methods of how to learn. Study Technology was developed by humanitarian and educator, L. Ron Hubbard. It is in use in 54 countries in public and private schools, community programs, as well as in job training and job readiness programs. Programs using Study Technology are licensed under Applied Scholastics International, a non-profit organization now based in St. Louis, Missouri.

Instruction in Study Technology includes training the student to identify barriers to study and to monitor his/her own comprehension. When comprehension breaks down, the student is trained to pinpoint the precise difficulty and correct it. The student masters the technique in step-by-step fashion. Vocabulary and dictionary skills are emphasized. Graphical aids, hands-on materials and manipulatives are used to increase understanding. Cooperative learning, peer tutoring and communication skills are also elements of this methodology. Progress through the program is self-paced.

Scientifically-Based Instruction

The authors of the publication, Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985) described the characteristics of a good reader as one who:

- Can construct meaning from text
- Reads fluently
- Is a strategic reader, controlling his/her reading in relation to the purpose and nature of the material being read
- Is motivated to read and can sustain attention and interest
- Continues to practice and refine reading skills
- Treats reading as a lifelong pursuit

Research has emphasized that in order to create strategic, active readers, students should be given direct instruction on steps to take when using comprehension "fix-up" strategies. They should not only be taught comprehension strategies explicitly, but should be taught how, why, and when to use them. Students need to be able to monitor their reading process and repair breakdowns in understanding when they occur, thus becoming self-directed, purposeful, independent learners. The HELP program provides students with specialized tutoring to develop these reading/study skills.

The educational standards created by each state delineate what students should know and be able to accomplish by grade level across the basic content areas. Underlying the comprehension of each of these content areas is the skill of being able to read for understanding and application.

Background and Organization of the Hollywood Education and Literacy Project (HELP)

The Hollywood Education and Literacy Project (HELP) began in Hollywood, California in 1996. It is a non-profit organization staffed by paid employees and volunteers with some funding from the State of California's Youth Mentoring Initiative. Acknowledgments and awards have been received for community service to at-risk youth from the Hollywood Police Activities League and the National Mentoring Conference (Spirit of Mentoring Award). Additionally, HELP board member, Tom Cruise, was recognized by the National Mentoring Partnership with their annual Mentoring Award for his work with HELP.

The center on Hollywood Boulevard is open six days a week from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays, with shorter hours on Saturday. Services are provided by tutor/mentors who volunteer. They come in through word of mouth promotion from the community and are trained in Study Technology. Prospective tutors are screened and receive forty hours of intensive in-house training to be a tutor/mentor in the project. The volunteers make a commitment to assist a student for the length of the student's program and are then assigned to work one-on one with a student four hours per week.

The HELP program has expanded to 21 projects in the continental United States. Each program is a volunteer organization utilizing the same pedagogical system and organizational pattern. The Hollywood center, while maintaining its delivery of assistance to the local community, has also become the training organization for these projects and for those who wish to utilize the HELP model and Study Technology in their community.

Details of the HELP Program

The object of the program is to turn students into strategic learners who become self-aware and able to identify when comprehension is failing. Strategic learners know and can proficiently apply the appropriate tool to correct any learning difficulty. Thus they are able to comprehend and apply the material studied.

The essential features of the program are:

An initial interview and testing with the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) for the purpose of determining the skill level and particular areas of concern or difficulty.

Based on the information gained, the student is given an individual program of tutoring and study. Programs generally include any of the following, depending upon need, as well as instruction in the basics of Study Technology:

• phonics instruction
• a grammar and communication course
• training in use of the dictionary
• interpersonal communications training.
• use of the Learning How to Learn, Study Skills for Life and Basic Study Manual books, depending upon reading level, the core materials for developing strategic learning skills.

A key element emphasized throughout the program is for the student to understand the definitions of the words being read so that the materials can be fully comprehended. Thus there is extensive work with dictionaries and the book *How to Use a Dictionary Picture Book for Children*. One of the important strategic learning techniques in Study Technology is helping the student to become an aware learner who is able to identify when he is no longer comprehending the material being read – and then being able to apply the correct Study Technology strategy to correct the non-comprehension. This often involves finding the words which are not adequately understood and using a dictionary to fully clarify their meaning.

Student who have had significant study problems often have communication difficulties. By increasing the student's ability to communicate, the student becomes far more able to apply the learning skills acquired.

Results

In the HELP program the initial skill level of the student is established by administering the reading section of the CTBS. It is given again later in the program as a post test. Of the various components of the test, the reading section is the one that most closely taps the skills and knowledge the program addresses.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the HELP program, the records of 100 participants for whom both pre-test and post-test data had been collected were examined. Seventy-four percent of these participants were of school age and 26% were adults. Fifty-eight percent are Hispanic and 42% are White,

Asian, African-American and Other, in that order of magnitude. The usual length of participation was about one year.
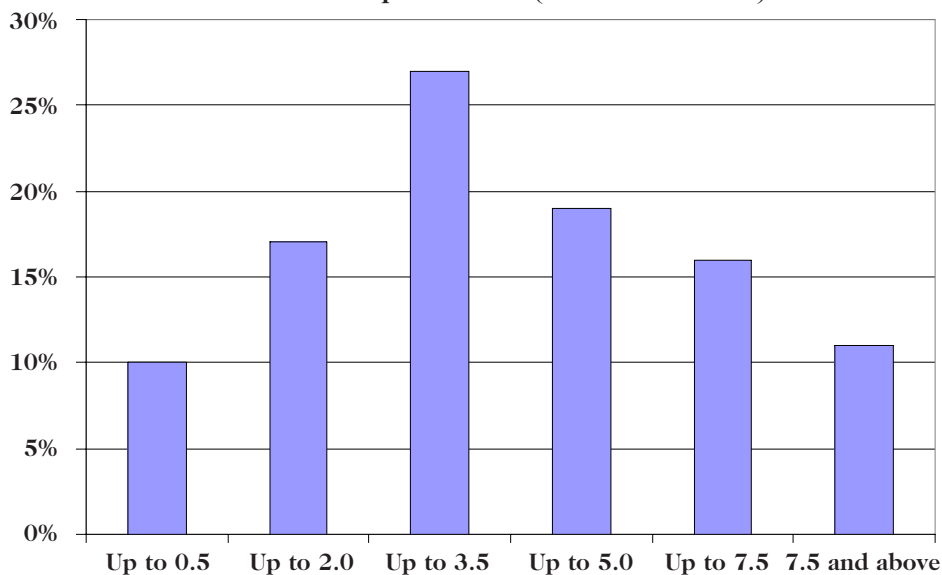
The graph below shows the grade level improvement for participants in the sample.

Summary of Results

The results indiate a substantial increase in literacy for the 100 participants.

- 73% of the 100 participants increased their reading level by 3.5 grade levels or better.
- Only 10 % failed to increase by at least 2.0 grade levels.
- 11% achieved an increase of 7.5 grade levels or better.

HELP Program
Grade Level Improvements (CTBS Test Scores)