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**ABSTRACT**

Project Literacy United States (PLUS) is a national service project initiated in December 1985 with the key goals of mobilizing and organizing community resources to deal with illiteracy on a local level and to raise awareness of the widespread illiteracy problem. Using concepts from the Navy's intensive reading immersion program, Memphis-Project Literacy's Westside High School intensive reading immersion program demonstrated that community partnerships can be established and mobilized to improve the basic skills of its young adults while enhancing the quality of their lives. The program incorporated special instructional techniques innovations, and incentives to increase the motivation and achievement of "at risk" youth. The program included an eye exam and hearing test; meals; group affiliation activities; communication with and participation of parents/guardians; business and community organization involvement; prompt feedback on student performance; and well-qualified and caring teachers. The Memphis-PLUS program was successful in: (1) raising student reading grade level; (2) providing a quality educational experience within school premises which helped to develop the student's individual potential while teaching self-discipline and perseverance; (3) creating an atmosphere of positive interpersonal relationships; (4) contributing significantly to each student's mental, emotional, and physical well-being; (5) demonstrating the success of a partnership approach uniting school, home, and community; (6) communicating to the community the needs of "at-risk" adolescents; and (7) providing cultural opportunities for the students. (Acknowledgments, two tables of data, and two appendixes containing questionnaires on student attitudes are attached.)

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# WHAT WORKS: A READING IMMERSION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK ADOLESCENTS

## REPORT NO. 88-1

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Naval Air Station Memphis  
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WHAT WORKS: A READING IMMERSION PROGRAM  
FOR AT-RISK ADOLESCENTS

by

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July, 1988

## BACKGROUND

Project Literacy United States (PLUS) is a national service project initiated in December 1985 by the Capital Cities/American Broadcasting Companies (ABC) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Key goals of this project are to mobilize and organize community resources to deal with illiteracy on a local level and to raise local and national awareness of the widespread illiteracy problem.

In response to the national literacy effort, a literacy coalition for the Memphis/Shelby County, Tennessee area was established. This coalition, Memphis-Project Literacy (M-PLUS), under the direction of Chairman, Rear Admiral David L. Harlow, Chief of Naval Technical Training, Naval Air Station Memphis, sought innovative methods to expand existing literacy delivery systems to reach greater numbers of adults/young adults.

Knowing the Navy had been conducting, since 1978, a successful remedial reading program for its young recruits, Admiral Harlow posed the following question:

Can concepts from the Navy's intensive reading immersion program be adapted for a community reading improvement program?

During the past year, five successful reading improvement projects, utilizing a 6-8 hour day, two week intensive reading comprehension program, were conducted by M-PLUS. All of the adult/young adult participants had an initial reading grade level equivalent to 3.0 - 7.0. Local participants in these programs were as follows:

1. City of Memphis employees released from work - taught off the work site.
2. Defense Logistics Agency (Federal Defense Depot) employees - released from work - taught at the work site (2 programs conducted).
3. Unemployed, high school dropouts from an innercity neighborhood - taught in a church facility.
4. "At-risk" high school students - taught in a summer (in-school) program.

The goals for these programs were to:

1. Raise public awareness of the characteristics of adults with literacy problems.
2. Mobilize community resources in a joint literacy project.
3. Provide successful, non-threatening learning experiences for adults/young adults.

4. Encourage completion of short term educational reading goals into attempts at long-term educational reading goals.

5. Restore and develop adult self-esteem.

6. Motivate young adults/adults to establish personal learning goals and participate in educational activities offered in the community.

7. Immerse the students in intensive reading comprehension activities to rekindle the desire/need to read better.

This report discusses the Reading Improvement Project conducted with "at-risk" (potential dropouts) high school students.

### INTRODUCTION

Business, industry, and government have already begun planning for the year 2000. Obviously, the workers of the next century will need more sophisticated skills than those required today. Unfortunately, today's educational systems are struggling to provide graduates who can demonstrate even minimal competency in the basic skills of reading, computation, communication and reasoning much less try to prepare students for tomorrow's more advanced skills. In order to improve the quality of American education and workforce, business and industry, schools, government and community organizations must adopt a partnership approach to attack the basic skills deficiencies of our citizenry, young and old. No longer can Americans afford for any of its young people to leave school without the tools they need to make their fullest contribution to society. Prevention and treatment of illiteracy must become a national goal; work toward this goal must begin in local neighborhoods. (3)

Memphis - Project Literacy's Westside High School intensive reading immersion program was a pilot project attempting to demonstrate that community partnerships can be established and mobilized to improve the basic skills of its young adults while enhancing the quality of their lives. More specifically, it was a pilot program planned to incorporate special instructional techniques/innovations/incentives to increase the motivation and achievement of "at risk" youth.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The reading immersion program was conducted for two weeks prior to the fall school opening of Westside High School. Jr. High/Sr. High students were transported to the program by a minibus that arrived at 7:30 a.m. After breakfast, three reading groups convened from 8:00 to 3:00 each day; on field trip days, the school day was extended. Classes were conducted in an air-conditioned, "open-space" room.

## STUDENTS/RECRUITMENT

The recruitment of students for this program was conducted by a Westside High School learning resource teacher. She contacted students who had been enrolled in her classes the previous school year; other students recruited were athletes she had tutored in a career ladder activity. Personal visits and telephone calls netted thirteen students who were willing to "give up" their last two weeks of summer vacation. Many of these students had just completed community jobs created for disadvantaged youth. An enthusiastic, caring teacher motivated these young people to take a risk - accept a challenge.

The demographic characteristics of these young adult learners were:

1. Age range - 11-18 years
2. Race - 11 Black, 2 White
3. Sex - 11 Male, 2 Female
4. Reading Pretest Scores Range - 2.4 - 6.1
5. School Grade - 7 - 11 (Majority 11th graders)

Coming into the program the majority of these students displayed the typical characteristics of "at-risk" (potential dropouts) students:

1. Lacked an affiliation with the school
2. Demonstrated inadequacy, insecurity and isolation.
3. Exhibited alienation with either extreme shyness or boisterousness
4. Lacked confidence, were easily discouraged, were painfully self-conscious about being several grade levels below their colleagues in basic skills
5. Voiced low self-esteem
6. Appeared bored, unmotivated and skeptical
7. Were disillusioned with the learning process

## INSTRUCTOR SELECTION AND STAFFING

Three instructors were selected to teach in the reading program. Two instructors, one elementary and one secondary-certified, were retired teachers who taught part-time in the adult basic education program. The third instructor, an eleven month, Career Ladder II Westside High School teacher, was a fifteen year veteran with a Master's Degree in Special Education/Learning Disability. Volunteer Navy Educational Specialists provided project administration and instructional support. Two Navy enlisted men, serving as role models for the innercity youth, actively participated as teacher aides and counselors.

This staffing pattern indicates that teachers for adult programs may not need, as a first priority, a long pedigree of educational credentials, but they need a caring attitude.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Students were pretested with the Gates-MacGinite Reading Test, Level D, Form 1 (comprehension section only) to determine entry reading level. This test was chosen because it is administered in the Navy's remedial reading course. Using these test reading grade level equivalents, curriculum materials were chosen, and three reading groups were formed. Within each group, individualized and group instruction were conducted. Individuals were allowed to proceed at their own rate while having the benefit of peer support in small group activities. All of the groups were combined for activities in preparation for field trips and for utilization of community-related materials such as the newspaper, maps, Tennessee Job service pamphlets and forms, and menus from local restaurants. The small reading groups concentrated on reading comprehension, study skills, communication skills, some writing skills and interpersonal relations. The larger group activities encouraged the development of an esprit de corps among all the students and allowed the Navy teacher aides opportunities to insert life experiences and expertise which seemed to enhance their image as role models.

High interest field trips served to broaden the inner city students' background knowledge by enriching vocabulary, introducing new personalities and concepts, and providing cultural experiences.

Assuming the students had a basic sight vocabulary and knew the elementary mechanics of reading, the program emphasis was on developing and strengthening reading comprehension - reading to learn and to grasp ideas. A variety of reading methods were used such as teacher/student oral reading, partner reading, directed reading and uninterrupted sustained silent reading. Some word identification was taught through application of phonics, structural/contextual analysis and dictionary usage. However, the majority of the instructional time emphasized processing the textual material to derive meaning from it and apply it to specific tasks that need doing in specific contexts. Skill development centered on these thought-getting processes:

1. Finding and understanding main ideas
2. Grasping sequences in time, place, ideas, events, or steps
3. Understanding relationships of events, characters, time, place, etc.
4. Understanding and following directions

5. Understanding character and setting
6. Grasping implied meanings/and drawing inferences/conclusions
7. Distinguishing fact and opinion
8. Overall analysis of facts and information - text level comprehension versus word/sentence level

The usual school group reading instruction with its time constraints does not lend itself well to individual student interpretation, prediction, evaluation or analysis. The development and practice of these more thought provoking/analytical skills require intensive, time-consuming efforts of both the individual student and the teacher.

This reading program with its small student/teacher ratio provided ample time and opportunity for the encouragement and development of these higher order skills. Worksheets and workbooks cannot replace teacher-led discussions of the ties between textual information and concepts and existing, individual student knowledge.

In the small groups, the teachers were able to help each student experience success because they were able to:

1. Capture student interest by relating to students' past experience or by providing a background of experience.
2. Help students establish a purpose for their reading and adapt reading strategies to accomplish their purpose.
3. Preteach vocabulary and concepts that might block their understanding.
4. Provide a variety of reading materials on individual ability levels.

The curricula materials used in this program were selected by the teachers from the inventory of excellent materials purchased for the Adult Education Division of the Memphis City Schools. Because one of the teachers had prior knowledge of the students' ability levels, their personal interests, and past school year curriculum materials, the materials selected were appropriate, challenging and enjoyable for each adolescent.

Each of the reading books was in booklet form which was less intimidating to the poor readers. Within each booklet, the reading selections began with stories short in length and gradually increasing in length as the success/confidence of the student developed. The easier beginning stories helped to overcome the students' failure mindset and guaranteed early success. Excellent textual display, the arrangement of words, pictures and white space on the page, contributed to the

readability and high interest of these materials. Poorer readers rely heavily on visual clues so the excellent, colorful illustrations satisfied these students' need for more than words. The excellent print size and spacing between lines of the materials and page space helped the students stay with the reading task and helped to accommodate for visual problems. As the reading passages became longer and more difficult in vocabulary, the questions to be discussed moved from the recall realm to more inferential and predictive questioning. A variety of reading activities allowed the teachers to teach different strategies for approaching a reading passage. Armed with these strategies, students were able to stretch to read material seemingly beyond their capabilities.

Newspapers were used daily to develop favorable attitudes toward reading. Students thrilled at working crossword puzzles with help from peers and teachers. Learning the mechanics of reading newspaper want ads gave the students new knowledge and a feeling of "adulthood". Skimming and scanning was learned easily while reading the entertainment or sports section. Interpreting and discussing an editorial cartoon was a first experience for most.

Vocabulary development became fun when the students looked at the picture of a "croissant" on their menu or viewed a "sarcophagus" in the Ramesses II Exhibition program.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The specific materials used are as follows:

<u>Reading for Today</u>	Steck-Vaughn Company
<u>Superstars of Soul</u>	Steck-Vaughn Company
<u>Reading Skills for Adults</u> (Blue/Green)	Steck-Vaughn Company
<u>Communication for Today</u>	
<u>Real Life Reading Skills</u>	Scholastic Book Services
<u>Our Nation's Story, Part I</u>	Portwood and Portwood
<u>Modern Reading Skill Text Series</u>	Charles E. Merrill
<u>Famous Black Americans</u>	Steck-Vaughn Company
<u>GED Scorebooster 2</u>	Steck-Vaughn Company
<u>Commercial Appeal</u>	Scripps-Howard Publishing
<u>Critical Thinking for Adults</u>	Steck-Vaughn
<u>Table and Graph Skills</u>	Weekly Reader Skills Book
<u>Horizons, Partners Challenge</u>	Charles E. Merrill
<u>Real Life Employment Skills</u>	Scholastic Book Services
City Maps	
Local Restaurant Menus	
Tennessee Job Service Pamphlets	

#### EVALUATION

Evaluative data on this intensive reading immersion program were collected using standardized instruments, questionnaires, data

sheets, interviews with teachers, students and participants, and field notes recorded by observers.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Level D, Form 1, was administered on a pretest, posttest basis. The comprehension section was used to record reading grade level. It consists of forth-three items using a multiple choice pattern of responses with the respondent choosing the best from four choices. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of .88 to .94 for alternate forms using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. Validity measures for the test were established for both young and older adults using literal and inferential reading passages suitable for the interests of both groups. (4)

The Attitude Toward Education Questionnaire, Appendix J, developed by Jones and Petry, was administered to measure the perceived effects of the program on six factors considered to be essential for a quality lifestyle. The instrument consists of sixteen items scored on a Likert-type five point response scale which ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument measures the factors of self-expression, self-concept, family life, leisure, relationships with others, and life in general. The validity of the instrument was determined using the judgment of experts familiar with the adult education literature from which the content of the items was drawn. Reliability was determined to be .78 using the Spearman-Brown Split Half technique. Individual scores can range from a maximum of 80 to a minimum of 16.

On the participant questionnaire, Appendix II, all thirteen students checked they had an excellent teacher, and were not afraid to ask the teacher for help. All indicated they would like to participate in another reading program and would encourage their friends to enroll. All students in the lowest reading group favored their receiving immediate help with their reading.

Table 1 indicates a mean reading grade level increase of .94 which was less than the gains experienced in the four M-PLUS programs with the older adults. However, these students received less instructional time due to the many field trips. Also, the severe vision problems of the majority of the students must be considered. The Gates posttest scores were consistent with the students' reading level on the Ekwall Reading Inventory (1) administered in the school during the first few weeks after completion of the M-PLUS project. Students did begin the new school year with enhanced reading skills.

Table 2 indicates on a scale of 1-5 that all of the students felt better about themselves, their education, their relationships with others, and life in general after participation in this reading improvement program. Raising student self-esteem before the school year began was a key goal of the program.

## PROGRAM EXECUTION

Planning and executing an innovative learning experience is as risky as it is exciting. This community had never attempted a partnership approach quite like this one; city, state and federal governments working jointly with private business and industry, and health care institutions banded together to conduct a successful learning experiment in a public school. This program was not designed to be a panacea or a quick fix for the literacy deficiency in our community, but it was designed as an innovative way to create student and teacher enthusiasm and motivation for "gearing up" to wage the personal and professional battle against illiteracy. As educational professionals, the program planners knew "what works" with young adults. Our task was to place into this program those elements/conditions that we know "work" and then learn lessons from their implementation into the unique setting we had devised.

## WHAT WORKS #1

Diagnosis and treatment of physical deficiencies make the learning event more successful for the individual learner.

## WHAT WE DID

Optometrists from the local Southern College of Optometry volunteered to come to the school and conduct a thirty minute vision screening for each of the students. They discovered that twelve of the students had visual defects that warranted more indepth analysis in the college clinic. During the second week of the program, students were transported by the teachers after class to the clinic where six students were fitted for prescription glasses and the rest were recommended for weekly 45 minute optometric vision training sessions. The glasses were paid for by government funds. Throughout the program certain students were encouraged to mark their words with fingers or markers to help their eyes focus.

Because good hearing is essential to becoming a good reader, hearing tests were conducted by the school system's speech and hearing center. No student had a hearing deficiency. Several students had obvious dental misalignment that surely contributed to their poor self-esteem.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

1. An overlooked factor in assessing reading ability is how well the individual can see.
2. Eye examinations in schools should be continued en masse throughout the junior and senior high years.
3. Teachers should be better trained to look for signs of visual problems and be encouraged to recommend visual evaluations.
4. Our students should have had glasses before beginning the reading program.

According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), reading requires the integration of eight different vision skills but only one or two of these skills are covered by quick-chart eye tests. (2)

Eye chart examinations in the local Memphis public school are conducted for grades K, 1, 3, and 5, but even these are discontinued, except for teacher referrals, in the upper grades. Seventy-five percent of the students in this program had indicated during an initial interview that they seemed to lose their place while reading. Half of the students indicated that print blurred after reading a short time. Only three mentioned aches in the temple or forehead. While most of the visual

problems revealed at the optometry clinic could only have been professionally diagnosed, teachers can become more cognizant of the symptoms of the visual deficiencies evidenced while students attempt to read. One wonders how much more academic achievement could have been gained if the students had begun the project with glasses. Attacking the lack of dental care for disadvantaged youth is "fighting windmills".

## WHAT WORKS #2

Good nutrition contributes to better learning.

## WHAT WE DID

Student apathy, short attention span and sleepiness in class are often attributable to poor nutrition in students from all socio-economical strata. Because poor nutrition generally goes hand in hand with poverty, breakfast and lunch were provided for the students. Shoney's South, the adopt-a-school business partner for Westside High School, provided a nutritional breakfast and lunch each day. This corporation also provided a dinner banquet at their nicest restaurant for all the program participants and their parents/guardians.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

1. The students developed conversational/social skills during the meal times. They interacted quite well with the teachers, support staff, and peers as they shared food and experiences. Bonding took place that aided student self-esteem.
2. The restaurant meal allowed parents/guardians to interact on a social basis with their young person's teacher; they observed first hand the unique relationships that had developed between their young person and volunteer authority figures.

### WHAT WORKS #3

Adolescents who have an affiliation with the school and other students show more interest and motivation in school.

### WHAT WE DID

Adolescents have an urgent need "to fit in" or belong to a group. Participation in this reading program gave these young people an identity that no others in the school had. Program T-shirts, newspaper articles, and school year visits by Navy personnel aided in the message to the rest of the school that these students were special. Interviews with the Westside teacher indicated that the program, its personnel and its activities gave the students opportunities to be in the classroom spotlight as program highlights were enthusiastically related. Not too many disadvantaged youths have received a certificate from an admiral, been personally served fried chicken by a chief executive, shared breakfast with a fighter pilot, played basketball with a submariner, had their pictures on the front page of a newspaper, appeared on television - to name a few firsts. Our students needed a positive affiliation and we gave them one. Persistence is directly related to the security one feels from being with a supportive group. The informal interactions, the quality and intimacy of experiences with the instructional staff and the community motivated the students to come each day and be a part of a program where they were accepted uncritically. This affiliation need must be a pivotal position in the development of programs for "at-risk" adolescents.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. The security and warmth that came with the group affiliation allowed students to develop interpersonal skills with peers, teachers and other community adults.
2. This affiliation engendered an ideal peer teaching/cooperative learning environment.
3. This affiliation allowed students to take on leadership roles they would never have been allowed to experience in a regular school program.
4. This affiliation gave students the confidence to admit deficiency and ask for help without feeling peer or teacher rejection.
5. Students soon began to replace the failure mindset with a successful one.

#### WHAT WORKS #4

Successful youth programs include good communication with and active involvement of parents/guardians.

#### WHAT WE DID

This reading program was "marketed" as a unique, enrichment opportunity available for students who had been recommended to attend by their teacher. The Westside teacher conveyed to the parents/guardians, whom she personally visited or called, that this program would be a privilege for their youngsters. She solicited parental cooperation in ensuring good attendance and conduct. Interestingly, a twosome who missed the bus were somehow promptly delivered to school. An initial newsletter explained the program goals, schedules, and activities. Parents/guardians were able to visit with all the students, program teachers, and support staff as they shared a free restaurant evening meal. Parents who attended the awards ceremony met the many government, business and community partners who had taken an interest in their young people. Good communication with the home elicits support.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. These students were excited to have someone from their home share the many new relationships and experiences with them.
2. Most parents/guardians will come to school activities in which their young people are being successful. We need to make sure each child is able to experience some success.
3. Basic survival needs are more urgent to many parents of disadvantaged children than the present/future educational needs of their children. The value of a good education must be communicated more clearly to parents as well as children. Literacy programs must be family literacy programs.

## WHAT WORKS #5

Business and community organizations can provide valuable resources not readily available within the educational community.

## WHAT WE DID

Education of its youth has become a national interest of many business and community organizations. Most of these are excited to be asked to participate in programs which will benefit youth. Often school needs are not voiced outside the educational community. When asked for specific contributions for this program, not one person or organization was unwilling to participate; in fact, we received much more than we had petitioned.

1. Tennessee State Employment Office was asked for job service pamphlets. We received pamphlets and a guest speaker.
2. The City of Memphis Parks and Museums was asked for free admission to a museum, we received free admission to two museums, a planetarium, and a national touring Exhibition of Ramesses the Great.
3. The Navy could supply a tour of vocational training facilities; it added a swimming party, and two technical trainers as teacher aides.
4. Shoney's South, the official corporate "adopt-a-school" sponsor for Westside, supplied not only free breakfasts and lunches but added a dinner banquet for the staff, students and parents where top managers waited tables.
5. Southern College of Optometry was asked to provide visual screenings; however, staff doctors provided onsite school screenings, worked after hours conducting examinations and filling prescriptions and personally delivered and fitted the glasses at the school.
6. Plough Enterprises, the junior high corporate sponsor, provided Cross pens to the participants.
7. Local merchants were asked to donate minimal school supplies; they countered that request by adding enough supplies for the students to begin the school year. They added they had never been asked to provide support or assist at the school.
8. Local state post-secondary schools were asked for promotional items; representatives personally brought encouragement and trinkets.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Don't expect business and community to know specific educational needs. Voice your needs. Ask for specific

contributions through the appropriate channels. Emphasize how each contribution is essential to program goals. The community is an eager partner waiting to help improve the education and skills of its youth. When businesses know the educational problems and become partners in their solutions, there is less opposition and resistance to school programs and spending. (5)

2. People and their organizations want to be active, on-the-scene participants, not just passive providers. Enthusiasm was contagious.
3. Businesses must become more vocal and aggressive as consumers of the high school graduate.
4. Community supporters are a great motivator for our young people.

## WHAT WORKS #6

Prompt feedback improves student performance.

## WHAT WE DID

Prompt feedback on student performance helps the learner to maintain a knowledge of how he is progressing and enables the teacher to assign appropriate student follow-on activities as well.

A small student-to-teacher ratio assures the immediate feedback a low achieving reader desperately needs. Incorporation of peer tutoring and cooperative learning techniques provided our students with a dynamic learning environment. Each of our three reading groups had a student-to-teacher ratio of 5:1 with periodic assistance provided by a teacher aide or resource person. Zintz proposed this 5:1 ratio because the poor reader needs the prompt feedback, the eye contact, and the opportunity for full exchange of ideas that he needs as motivation to succeed. (9)

Phi Delta Kappan reported one characteristic of a successful school is one that pays individual attention to students. (7) Small reading groups can provide that special individualized attention a young person needs. Arranging the teacher and the students around a single table aided communication and promoted a team spirit which enhanced student performance. Now the student, who usually occupied the back seat in a room and never contributed to classroom discussion, had to become an active participant; no one would let him be a passive learner or a simple observer. He was not skipped over; he was not permitted to get lost. This timely, supportive feedback coupled with the nonthreatening learning environment fostered strong student motivation to succeed. Student progress was monitored hour by hour.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Choose beginning reading materials to assure early success for the adolescent poor reader. His fear of failure can be traumatic enough to hinder his ability to function.
2. Adolescent poor readers are uneasy at first with all the personal attention received in the small group. Direct eye contact may be difficult for some at first.
3. When a student experiences some success each day, he knows he is learning; he becomes excited about attacking another skill. Nothing succeeds like success.
4. Being worthy of another's undivided attention is a strong motivator for success.

5. The prompt feedback from peers and teachers fostered a strong interdependence among the students themselves. The students motivated each other because they had common deficiencies; they were no longer alienated from their classmates.

## WHAT WORKS #7

Good teachers create an environment conducive to learning.

### WHAT WE DID

We chose good teachers/teacher aides. The three lead teachers, of course, had the academic credentials, but more importantly, all five instructors had a "degree in caring." When the United States Office of Education completed its three year study of methods of teaching reading, the one big generalization drawn was a good teacher, not special twists in methodology, is the most controlling variable in student success. (9)

Our teachers had to be warm, friendly, patient, uncritical and enthusiastic to tackle these "at-risk" adolescents who were basically disillusioned with the learning process. We knew these students had enrolled in the reading program mainly out of respect for their resource teacher who seemed to take a personal interest in them. We had to establish this caring attitude early. We used the "single table" approach. Students and their teachers shared a single table during the small group instructional time; the adolescents seemed to enjoy this closeness with the teachers. Sharing the friendly "family style" breakfast and lunch, students and teachers were able to share personal experiences and humor while developing closer relationships. Our teachers became partners in the learning experience. Students learned from teachers, teachers learned from students - they all learned together. Motivation to read was increased as students began to value group learning and group success.

High expectations in attendance, behavior, and achievement were reinforced with frequent and honest praise. The learning environment was purposeful and peaceful.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Getting to know the students personally helped the instructors make the reading sessions more relevant and interesting.
2. Utilizing community resource people in the program added excitement and a learning dimension for the teachers.
3. "At-risk" adolescents thrive on innovations which are unlike the normal school environment.
4. "At-risk" students achieve more from a cooperative learning environment than from a competitive learning environment.
5. The warm environment of the small group is conducive to correcting poor speech habits and providing supportive oral reading sessions.

## WHAT WORKS: CONCLUSION

An intensive reading immersion program is successful with "at-risk" adolescents.

## WHAT WE DID

1. Raised student reading grade level (see Table (1))
2. Provided a quality educational experience within the school premises which helped to recognize and develop the student's individual potential while teaching self-discipline and perseverance.
3. Created an atmosphere of positive interpersonal relationships.
4. Made a significant contribution to each student's mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
5. Demonstrated success through the partnership approach of school, home, and community.
6. Helped communicate to the community the needs of "at-risk" adolescents.
7. Provided cultural opportunities for students.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Obviously, we learned there is much "work" to do:

### READING CHALLENGES "TO WORK" ON

1. Separate reading improvement courses available in both junior and senior high for students reading several grade levels below the norm.
2. A "Reading Across the Curriculum Program" where individual course objectives must include student demonstration of reading skills/strategies unique to the course and textbook. Students are taught text-specific "reading to learn" strategies.
3. Inservice Programs to prepare all teachers to teach reading skills within and for their specific curriculum.
4. A generic study skills module taught systematically to each student - includes note taking, test taking, skimming/scanning, etc. A recommendation from A Nation at Risk (6).
5. Increased involvement of community and parents in attacking youth illiteracy.
6. Solicit active involvement/partnership of the business community in innovative literacy programs.

7. Ensure every parent knows the reading grade level of his child and is familiar with available remediation/enrichment programs.
8. Implementation of more summer intensive, reading immersion programs, especially for "at-risk" adolescents.

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The writers wish to thank the many individuals/organizations whose contributions helped make this project a success, and, most importantly, helped make good memories for these often neglected, young adults. Thanks for sharing and caring.

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Brenda Pilant, Teacher, Westside High School  
Kathryn Pickle, Director, Memphis City Schools

### MANAGERS/EMPLOYEES OF SHONEY'S SOUTH, INC.

PLOUGH ENTERPRISES - Adopt-A-School Sponsor (junior high)

### SOUTHERN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY

Dr. Diane Serex-Dugan  
Dr. Pete Davis

### MEMPHIS CITY GOVERNMENT

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### SHELBY STATE/STATE TECHNICAL INSTITUTE AT MEMPHIS

### BHN CORPORATION

Mr. Kevin Norman

### M-PLUS STEERING COMMITTEE

### THE CHIEF OF NAVAL TECHNICAL TRAINING

Rear Admiral David L. Harlow for caring about our youth and allowing us to participate in such a worthwhile project.

More importantly, sincere appreciation to our students who took the risk and the initiative to improve themselves.

TABLE 1

STUDENT AGE/GRADE 1. SCHOOL/READING  
GRADE LEVEL USING GATES-MACGONITIE  
READING TEST

AGE	SCHOOL GRADE	PRETEST	POSTTEST	GAIN SCORE
15	10	4.7	6.4	1.7
17	10	6.1	6.4	.3
17	11	5.8	5.8	.0
17	9	4.3	3.4	.9
18	11	3.2	4.7	1.5
18	11	3.8	4.7	.9
11	7	3.0	4.7	1.7
13	8	4.5	5.3	.8
17	11	3.0	4.5	1.5
13	9	3.8	5.6	1.8
16	11	2.4	3.2	.8
17	9	2.8	3.5	.8
18	10	3.4	4.7	1.3

Mean Age = 15.9

Mean School Grade = 9.7

Mean Pretest = 3.91

Mean Posttest = 4.85

Mean Gain = .94

TABLE 2  
ATTITUDE TOWARD EDUCATION QUESTIONNAIRE

N = 13

<u>FACTOR</u>	<u>MEAN RATING</u>
Self Expression	4.54
Education	4.26
Family Life	4.27
Life in General	4.31
Leisure	4.08
Relationship with Others	4.25

APPENDIX I

ATTITUDE TOWARD EDUCATION

Directions: The following are statements concerning this class. Their purpose is to gather information about the attitudes that learners have about this class. The statements are of such nature that there are no right or wrong answers. Please indicate your personal opinion concerning each statement by circling the appropriate response at the right of each statement.

- Key: 5 - Strongly Agree (SA)  
 4 - Agree (A)  
 3 - Undecided (U)  
 2 - Disagree (D)  
 1 - Strongly Disagree (SD)

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I feel that I can talk more easily with other people.	5	4	3	2	1
2. This class has helped me to express my ideas on paper.	5	4	3	2	1
3. This class has helped me to express my ideas orally.	5	4	3	2	1
4. This class has increased my ability to complete reading tasks.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I am more open to change and new ideas because of this class.	5	4	3	2	1
6. This class has increased my desire to better myself educationally.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I feel more confident when I am with my family.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I feel this class has improved my relationships with my family.	5	4	3	2	1
9. This class has enabled me to be more confident about my future goals.	5	4	3	2	1
10. In this class, I have gained some wisdom and insight about life.	5	4	3	2	1
11. This class has caused me to read more in my leisure time.	5	4	3	2	1

	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. Because of this class, I have a wider interest range.	5	4	3	2	1
13. This class has reinforced the idea that I have a responsibility to others.	5	4	3	2	1
14. Because of this class, I am better able to work with groups of people.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I am more open to the different life-styles of others.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I am more open to the opinions of others.	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX II  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your help in completing this questionnaire. The answers to the following items will help us describe the program and to change it where changes are needed.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Last grade of school completed: (please circle)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
6. Circle any or all statements which are true due to your being in this reading program.
  - a. I don't mind reading out loud as much as I did before.
  - b. I learned many new words.
  - c. I learned to read better out loud and silently.
  - d. I enjoyed learning and reading new materials.
  - e. I plan to practice my reading more at home (magazines/newspapers).
  - f. I understand what I read better now.
  - g. I was not afraid to ask for help from my teacher.
  - i. I felt comfortable reading in and to my small group.
  - j. My teacher helped make my reading interesting.
  - k. I feel I wasted my time in this reading program.
  - l. I felt that my teachers wanted to help me with my reading.
  - m. I realize I have to work on my reading outside of school.
  - n. I feel better prepared to start school next week.
7. The reading I did in this program was  
\_\_\_\_ Too Hard  
\_\_\_\_ Just Right  
\_\_\_\_ Too Easy

8. Did your teacher explain things well most of the time?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

9. When you did not come to class, the reason was

- Sickness
- No child Care
- Feeling depressed
- Bad Weather
- Too Tired
- Not Enough Sleep
- Working at Home
- Working at a Job
- Not interested in coming

10. Name any problem you had while you were attending this class.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

11. How would you rate your teacher from this class?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. OK
- d. Poor

12. Check the things you liked about this program.

- Field Trips
- Teachers
- Books Stories I read
- Met new People
- Had my eyes/ears checked
- Food
- Immediate Help with my Reading

13. List anything about the program you did not like.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

14. List other reading ideas or things that should be added to the program.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

13. Who did you tell about this program?

- |                                   |                                       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coach    | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor | <input type="checkbox"/> Other People |

16. Would you like to do a reading program again?

- Yes  
 No      WHY NOT? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Would you tell a friend to go to another reading program like this?

- Yes  
 No

18. What kinds of things do you read at home?

- Religious Material  
 Magazines  
 Newspapers  
 Books (novels)  
 School Books (Encyclopedias)  
 Comic Books  
 Don't read at home  
 Any other (name some)

19. When you did not understand something in our class, was it

- Easy for you to ask questions.  
 Hard for you to ask questions.

20. While I was in this reading program, I

- Did my best.  
 Didn't care how I did.  
 Wish I had tried harder.

21. Write a sentence describing your favorite experience with this project/class.

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