

# *Self-Instruction: An Experimental Program*

**ROBERT L. CRANE  
MARJORY E. JACOBSON**

**T**HE Self-Instruction Center is the name given to the location for students who participate in an experimental project at Webber Junior High School in Saginaw, Michigan. The project is formally called the Adjusted-Study Program, a title which is not particularly original. Similar programs have been tried in other school districts, for example, Forsyth Junior High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Webber Junior High School has an enrollment of 1,040 students in grades 7, 8, and 9, located in a lower-middle class neighborhood in the southeastern part of Saginaw. The racial breakdown of the school's enrollment is approximately 62 percent White, 22 percent Black, and 16 percent Mexican American. This distribution resembles very closely the total racial makeup of the entire city.

Webber, like most junior high schools of its size, has a number of students experiencing behavioral as well as learning difficulties. As in many other urban settings during the past few years, the number and seriousness of these difficulties have been growing. The rate of this growth is out of proportion to increasing enrollment. Several methods, such as counseling, reprimanding, parent conferences, individualized attention from

teachers, services of school social workers, and innovative remedial and enrichment-type programs have been tried to help these youngsters. These have met with varying measures of success. In spite of these efforts, many of the problems persist.

During the 1970-71 school year the curriculum committee of the building faculty spent much of its time discussing the situation and examining many programs that might be effective. After a great deal of work, the Adjusted-Study Project was developed. The program was proposed to the board of education which, after careful study, accepted and funded the project on a pilot basis for the fall of 1971.

A regular classroom was converted into a comfortable, lounge-type setting and was provided with equipment, such as study carrels, cassette recorders, filmloop projector, record player, language-master, cash register, adding machines, and a number of other items appropriate for individualized instruction.

A referral plan was developed in which a youngster experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties could be referred to the Adjusted-Study Program in the Self-Instruction Center. This could be done by his classroom teachers, counselor, or an administrator.

Student self-referral, which has been occurring more and more frequently, was another possibility. All referral applications are reviewed by a screening committee made up of counselors, teachers, and administrators who try to determine whether or not this program would be helpful to the youngster.

If a student is admitted to the program, he is scheduled from the class which is giving him most difficulty into the Self-Instruction Center for two class periods each week. Consecutive days are avoided. This is a very important aspect of the program because the referring teacher agrees to continue working with the youngster. According to the design of the program, the student remains in the classroom the remaining three days. His teacher confers with the instructor in the SIC regarding the youngster's needs and progress. The referring teacher also agrees to send academic assignments to the SIC to coordinate instruction for the student. Thus it is the responsibility of the referring teacher to continue evaluating the youngster's academic work.

With this type of program, classroom teachers have the opportunity to help youngsters stay in class rather than "get rid" of them. The program also affords teachers the opportunity to examine their own techniques and to apply successful methods used in the SIC to the logistics and instruction in their own classrooms.

Certainly the key to success in any program such as this is the careful selection of the Adjusted-Study instructor. He also must be a very patient, understanding person, with a wide knowledge of subject matter and teaching strategies and, most important, a sincere interest in helping deviant youngsters to improve their lot.

It should be pointed out that every effort

has been made to secure a supportive staff to assist the instructor. Fortunately, many college students from nearby Saginaw Valley College and Delta College have offered their services as part-time tutors. The program has been primarily aided by full-time student teachers from Michigan State University. Tutors and student teachers together have complemented one another in contributing toward the development of the program.

A student must learn to accept responsibility for his own actions while in the SIC. He will be encouraged and motivated as much as possible, but in the final analysis he must take it upon himself to make an effort. Obviously, a program such as this is not going to solve all the ills of deviant youngsters. Therefore, it is to be expected that anyone considering such a program is certain to experience some difficulties; however, it appears at this point that SIC statistics will show success not only in improved attitudes and fewer antisocial behaviors but increased achievement as well. Also, there has never been a single incident in the SIC that could be considered for referral as a discipline problem.

It is our feeling that Adjusted-Study should go beyond application to deviant youngsters. If the same instructional design and techniques could be applied to our average and gifted students, undoubtedly, even greater achievement would be realized. A program which adjusts the interests and aptitudes of students to their needs would have an excellent opportunity for implementation through independent study or small-group seminars in the Self-Instruction Center.

—ROBERT L. CRANE, *Principal, and*  
MARJORY E. JACOBSON, *Director, Adjusted-Study Program; both at Webber Junior High School, Saginaw, Michigan.*

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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036

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