Model for Systemic Implementation of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment

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Introduction

For those of us who are "hooked" on Feuerstein, it is a source of great pleasure when we hear of new implementation sites for Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (a program developed by Professor Reuven Feurestein to enhance thinking and learning skills). On the other hand, it is a source of great distress when we hear of programs that have been discontinued. When programs are initiated with grant monies, there is always the danger that when the grant runs out, the program will be dropped. Also, when implementation is strongly supported and encouraged by one particular person, the program could be in jeopardy if that person is moved to another position.

When I, as director of the Southeastern Center for the Enhancement of Learning, was asked by the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools to prepare a proposal for a Pilot Program to implement Instrumental Enrichment, my staff and I wanted to do everything we could "up front" to insure continuation after the pilot was completed. This resolve, along with our past experiences and informal research with colleagues led to the development of a Model for the Systemic Implementation of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment.

Learning Readiness

Before presenting the five-phase model, I will briefly present the learning theory on which the model is based. It is our position at SCEL that there is a construct which we call "Learning Readiness" which is defined by four characteristics which must be present in an individual before he/she can gain maximum benefit from structured learning

experiences. (Wood, 1996) These characteristics could be considered prerequisites for learning:

1. The disposition for learning
2. Adequate cognitive functioning
3. Adequate knowledge base for the content being presented
4. Adequate study skills and strategies

Even when these four characteristics are accessible, however, learning is not likely to take place unless the circumstances in which the individual finds himself/herself make it possible for the individual to apply them. (These circumstances could be personal situations, geographic location, curriculum offerings, quality of instruction, etc.)

Each of these characteristics could be elaborated, but are presented here only as background for the development of the implementation model. The school curriculum traditionally emphasizes the need for remediation when a student's knowledge base is weak, but often does not provide support for the other characteristics of learning readiness.

Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment offers a curriculum to develop the cognitive functions that are necessary for learning. It also directly addresses the disposition for learning, and indirectly addresses study skills. This makes Instrumental Enrichment a powerful tool for developing learning readiness in those who have significant deficiencies in cognitive functioning and for strengthening learning readiness in those whose cognitive functioning is reasonably well developed.

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Phase One - Awareness

Introduction of the Program - to school personnel and the general public.

Progress Reports - in the form of short, newsletter communications and regular news releases, to generate interest in the project and to provide updates throughout the implementation of the project.

Dissemination of Results - including in-progress, summative, and long-term results, both qualitative and quantitative.

Phase Two - Training

Teacher training for Instrumental Enrichment (IE) will be over a three-year period (one level each year). Follow-up mentoring and classroom observation will be a part of the program. In addition, at least two counselors at each site will be trained to administer the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD).

Phase Three - Implementation

Following teacher training, IE will be introduced into the curriculum in three consecutive years (one level each year). Weekly sharing and planning sessions coordinated by the trainer are recommended as a part of the implementation.

Phase Four - Evaluation

A research design for the program will be developed. In-progress evaluation and follow-up evaluation will be a part of that design. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation measures will be taken for student participants and teachers.

Phase Five - Continuation

Continuation of the program after the initial training and implementation will require training at least two teachers at each site to become Certified IE Trainers for new

teachers. In addition, provisions for the continued purchase of student materials must be made. (Wood, 2000)

This model is quite different from what often takes place when schools decide to implement IE. Far too often the plans include only scheduling training for teachers and the purchase of curriculum materials for students. Our model is much richer and also more demanding. For example, although the adequate training of teachers is by far the most critical element of successful implementation, and is a necessary condition for success, it is not a sufficient condition for success.

In our model, "Awareness" sessions for administrators, teachers, parents, and the general public precede teacher training. This is the public relations component of the model. Feuerstein, his theories and his methods, can not only stand public scrutiny but also welcome it. Teachers and Administrators who are not directly involved in teaching IE should be familiar with the basic concepts and approaches in order to aid in the bridging to content in other subjects; Parents should be aware of the goals of the program and should be offered instruction in how they can enhance the learning experiences of their children; and the General Public should be informed not only of the goals of IE, but of the progress that is being made as the program is implemented.

Communication is essential, and in most school systems, there are staff members who can perform this function, but in other cases, outside professional help may be advisable. To provide such help, the SCEL staff includes a public relations coordinator who is available for consultation if needed. In either case, the Awareness Phase should be included in initial planning and budgeting, and should continue throughout the implementation process.

Each trainer makes a commitment for follow-up visits and our model for successful implementation suggests that the school system plan for these visits. They should include observation of IE class sessions and meetings with teachers to answer questions and provide support. However, we have found these visits are often difficult to arrange, especially if they have not been planned for and budgeted for "up-front".

Two additional training components, other than training teachers to implement IE, are suggested in our model. The Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD) is a dynamic assessment tool that should be available to complement IE instruction for special cases where more in depth assessment of cognitive functioning is needed. It is not necessary that all teachers of IE are trained to administer the LPAD, but we are suggesting that at least two persons from each school receive such training. Those with backgrounds in psychology are natural candidates, but any teacher who has training in Instrumental Enrichment and has an interest in assessment would be eligible.

The second additional training we are suggesting is mentioned in the Continuation Phase of our model. In any school system, new teachers join the staff each year. Since teachers trained in IE may retire or take new appointments, at least some of these new teachers need to be trained in IE. Since continuing to bring outside trainers in for such training is not practical, at least two teachers in each system should be trained as trainers. These teachers would have to complete all three levels of IE training and should have demonstrated a high level of proficiency and interest in teaching IE. Trainers' training is offered each summer in Israel by Professor Feuerstein's staff, and on occasion is offered in the United States. (The last training in the U.S. was at Brown University in 1998.) As

with other parts of the model, funds must be provided for this training, and should therefore be included "up-front" in the initial planning.

Research abounds on the results of IE programs in other countries, but studies of programs in the U.S. are very limited. (Ben Hur, 1994: Kozulin, 1998) Those who are caught up in the training and implementation for IE see the results, and the value of the program is affirmed for them, but too often gathering statistical data to support their "feelings" is almost an afterthought, sometimes precipitated by a threat to continuation of the program. Good research must be carefully planned. For this reason, we have a research coordinator at SCEL. Even when there are proficient research staff people in the school system, outside consultation can sometimes be helpful.

Conclusion

This model for the systemic implementation of Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment is a guide for successful program design. It provides a means for surviving the grant process, personnel changes, and budgetary considerations that could threaten the continuation of an Instrumental Enrichment program. However, it is clear from the model that Instrumental Enrichment is not a "quick fix" program. It requires a tremendous investment of time, effort and money, but IT WORKS.

References

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