

Preface

Ten years old, he was still classified as a first grader. Labeled “mildly mentally retarded” by the school psychologist, he received special instruction and tutoring through an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). He also attended an after-school program and worked with a mentor. All the same, he still could not read (not even at the pre-primer level), did not know any vowel or consonant sounds, and, furthermore, had absolutely no desire to learn to read. His mother had told him that he would never be able to read, and he had accepted this to be true. Therefore, he refused to even try. Two years after he was placed in a group-centered after-school intensive reading program, he’s reading. His progress was slow, but he was now learning to read. Why? What made the difference?

Group-centered programs enable students to learn concepts that they have been unable to learn in the regular classroom or even through tutoring or traditional after-school programs. The key to group-centered programming is to combine learning and counseling into a single group program. Merely placing children in a group setting is not sufficient. It is the group-centered structure which makes this approach work.

This book is for those who work with students in an after-school program, particularly those who develop, plan, and select the curriculum and activities for after-school programs. The book incorporates step-by-step instructions to teach readers how to develop a year-long curriculum. Developing a year-long program is much different than developing a 1-hour or week-long session. By the end of this book, the reader will be able to create an effective year-long after-school group-centered prevention program.

This is the third book in a series about group-centered prevention. The first volume, *Group Interventions in Schools: Promoting Mental Health for At-Risk Children and Youth* (2008), introduced the concept of group-centered prevention and presented step-by-step directions for developing 1-hour pull-out style school-based interventions. The second book, *Group-Centered Prevention Programs for At-Risk Students* (2011), covered how to design intensive 10-hour week-long motivational group-centered prevention programs. This third book gives step-by-step directions

for developing year-long after-school programs. The three books may be used together or independently. They can be used for workshops, continuing education courses, in-service training, parent groups, or counselors who wish to add to their knowledge in group prevention. Each book could easily be included in an undergraduate or graduate class discussing group prevention, school-based interventions, community after-school programs, at-risk children and teens, or issues in educational psychology.

This book explains the theoretical reasons for using an interactive group-centered approach in after-school programs. This book also identifies the unique needs of an ongoing year-long after-school program as opposed to a short-term program. All too often, after-school workers try to use curriculum or programming ideas intended for short-term pull-out interventions. Children engaged in 1-week programs have totally different needs than children participating in a year-long program. This book identifies and tells how to fulfill these year-long programming needs.

Each chapter begins with a brief case study. Chapter 1 discusses selecting participants, organizing for different ages, and setting up and developing an after-school program. Multicultural and gender considerations are discussed. Chapter 2 examines hands-on learning techniques in a group-centered after-school program, emphasizing the theories that support group-centered prevention. Chapter 3 talks about incorporating counseling techniques and mental wellness into the design for an effective after-school program. Step-by-step examples for writing learning center workstations highlight both counseling and learning issues. Chapter 4 will cover how to use intrinsic motivation and hands-on skill-building interventions to bring about desired behavioral change and academic learning. Learning to use motivation constructively is essential in after-school programs. Chapter 5 shows how group process brings about change, stressing the importance of cohesion. It includes interventions to develop cohesion during an after-school program and looks at creative group-centered therapy techniques. Chapter 6 provides ready-to-use methods to maintain positive, effective group interaction during a year-long program. Guidelines for appropriate self-disclosure, group behavior, and initiating positive feedback are discussed. Chapter 7 will discuss how to handle conflicts with both children and adolescents. There are conflicts and problems in every group. Chapter 8 discusses how after-school programs fit into the overall learning environment. Observational exercises and group-centered interventions will help those using the book to apply what they have learned back to the after-school setting.

Each chapter ends with a ready-to-use group-centered intervention that can be used at a learning center workstation. Each learning center example represents a specific theoretical concept and demonstrates how to use that concept in a year-long after-school program. A special table of contents lists all of the interventions. This makes it simple to select a learning center example or refer to an example as you follow each step in the design process.

Each chapter is also packed with group-focused observational activities and troubleshooting checklists specifically geared to after-school programs. A case study example of a group-centered after-school prevention program, the *Reading Orienteering Club*, is used throughout the book to illustrate how to organize and

facilitate a year-long program but a year-long program packet is much too lengthy to be included in its entirety in an appendix. The *Reading Orienteering Club* is listed in the reference section for those who are interested in learning more about the program.

The 10-year-old student from the opening example participates in the *Reading Orienteering Club*, a year-long group-centered after-school community-based prevention program that emphasizes phonological awareness, reading and writing, spelling, and intensive hands-on instruction. It incorporates group counseling interventions teaching the children to manage anger, interact and work with others in a group, handle stress and anxiety, develop social skills, counter bullying, and work through feelings of failure.

A case study example of a typical session is included. The case example is from the *Reading Orienteering Club*, a group-centered after-school prevention program.

Case Example

The session begins with an action story that emphasizes the vowel sound for the day. A story talks about how *Andy the Ant* and *Gail the Snail* learn to share, take turns, and become better friends. The children help tell the story by acting out portions of the story. The short A sound, which the children learned about during the previous session, is reviewed. A fun vowel-clustered action story helps children review and begin to practice vowel sounds.

The children then go out to the hands-on learning center workstations. The rooms are laid out by points on a compass—North, Northeast, Northwest, and so on. Eight different learning center workstations correspond to the points on the compass. Each compass workstation has a notebook with a different assignment for the day. Children travel around the room to all eight workstations but may start at any workstation. Today, the children work on the seven different vowel combinations that use the long A vowel sound: AI, AY, EI, EY, EA, EIGH, and silent E.

At the North station, the children read a story about *Gail the Snail*. The story emphasizes the seven vowel combinations that can be used to make the long A vowel sound. The story ends with a challenge step. Children are invited to *Take the Challenge* and write their own imaginative ending to the story. This helps children practice reading and writing the day's vowel sound. The story ending asks the child to decide how to solve a problem (counseling skill) that *Gail the Snail* is having in her group.

At the Northeast workstation, children are trying to *capture* as many *tricky words* as possible. The words emphasize the long A sound being studied today. To capture a word means to find a word that the child cannot read or spell—a word that the child does not know. The children will then use the *4-step method* (say the word, spell the word with letters, write the word, and give a definition and sentence using the word). The children are looking for tricky words by reading a long paper *grapevine* which stretches halfway across the room. Each child is trying to find five tricky words.

Everyone is trying to capture as many words as possible today and will add their tricky words to their word list as they travel around to each station. The word list is being used for today's craft project, but the craft project is like a puzzle. The children have to figure out what they are making by the clues at each workstation. A captured word is a word that the child does not know or cannot read or spell; therefore, children are practicing and learning new words as they travel around the room to each station. The children learn to work together as they move from station to station with different group members. The day's group counseling concept is taking turns while sharing.

The Northwest station features more than ten books graded by ability and labeled as Step 1....Step 3. The children start at Step 1, select one book, and read to the station helper(s) until they capture five new tricky words to add to their word list. Children who are struggling may find all five tricky words at Step 1. Other children may continue selecting books and reading until they get to Step 3. Naturally, the books are graded by ability; therefore, no one is given a book that they cannot read and there are always challenge books to encourage even the most reluctant of readers. Motivation and self-efficacy are key group skills being practiced at this workstation. Again, the children capture tricky words and add these words to their word list using the *4-step method*.

The East workstation stresses healthy eating, sometimes with a healthy snack. Today, the children are sorting pictures of healthy and not-so-healthy foods into baskets. The words *cake* and *steak* emphasize two of the not-so-healthy food choices and also emphasize the vowel sound being studied today. Children search through the pictures to find five foods that use the long A vowel sound. They practice spelling the words out loud and then add the words to their word lists.

When the children go South, they use letter tiles to spell words as the helper reads a designated list of words. Each time they capture a word, they stop and write the word down on their word list, look up a definition in the dictionary, and think of a sentence using the word. The idea is not just to capture words but to learn them. Students must take turns and share the letter tiles. They also learn to help each other use the dictionary. Working together as a team (without competition) is stressed.

At the Southeast station, before the children start, they are told that they must make a paper plate face puppet. They read simple step-by-step instructions to make a paper plate puppet. Each child is given a paper plate on which to draw a face. They add a handle to their paper plate face to make it into a puppet. They use their word strips to make hair. The guys always seem to want to cut their strips and make spikey hair out of the word strips; girls frequently like to make long curls or ringlets. Creativity is always encouraged. The only rule is that you must be able to read all of the captured words. Remember, these are words that the children did not know at the beginning of the session. If they are still having trouble with any of the words, the station helper helps the child follow the *4-steps*.

At the Southwest station, each child practices reading a puppet play. The play is written with both easy and challenging puppet parts so that everyone will be able to participate.

When they go West, the children select a chapter book. This station is repeated for 6 weeks. They will spend 6 weeks reading the book they select. By the end of the 6 weeks, the children will design and make a costume for the main character and give a report about the book for a videotaped pretend TV show. Reading for details to design a costume helps children focus attention and look for details in a story. Once again, the children use the *step system*, starting at Step 1 to select a book at their reading level. There are over 30 books laid out at the three steps. The idea is to rebuild self-efficacy (belief that they can succeed) by encouraging the children to read harder and harder books. Using steps instead of reading levels or grades saves children from being embarrassed. It also encourages children who might settle for simply reading the easiest book available to search for harder books in order to find the five tricky words that they need for their puppet. If they do not capture five words at Step 1, they go on to Step 2 or Step 3. Also, they follow step-by-step instructions and make colorful bookmarks so that they will be able to find their place in the chapter book each session. Following step-by-step instructions helps to increase comprehension because you cannot make a project if you do not understand the words you have read.

It should be mentioned that children do not move around the compass points in groups or move between workstations at designated intervals. Everyone works at their own pace, spending more time where they are struggling. This helps to individualize instruction since there are helpers at each workstation to help anyone who is having difficulty with the task. In one 2-hour session, the children have practiced reading, writing, spelling, focusing their attention, comprehension, following step-by-step instructions, learning new words, and practicing a specific vowel cluster for the day. They have also practiced interaction and group skills, focusing attention on a specific task, social skills and working nicely with others in a group, leadership and team building without competition, and rebuilding self-efficacy.

Intensive reading instruction in a group-centered atmosphere is the goal. This is a perfect approach for an after-school program because it can accommodate a variety of ages and allow each child to work at their own ability level. The group-centered approach also incorporates the healing therapeutic power of group process by encouraging the children to work together in a cohesive group atmosphere. The puppet play and the pretend TV show give the children opportunities to practice leadership and group process skills.

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