Group 3 – North West Central Study Group

I am from the North West Central group which consisted of 9 people from 2 SIAST campuses, SIIT, DTI and Prairie West Regional College. Like most of the other groups in attendance one of our main concerns was retention or "Why are people dropping out of our programs?" This has always been a big concern for me , as during the past 3 years the drop out rate in my classroom has been 30%, 43% and 30%. But to top it all off, my percentage rate was 29% in only 5 weeks of classes this term. But like most instructors, I already had a humungous work load and did not want to get involved in something that was going to take hours of work, preparation, evaluation and numerous meetings to attend. Action research seemed to fill the bill. So, I was very thankful to be in group that felt the same way as I did , and decided to go for individual projects that we could try out in our own classrooms and meet at the end to discuss our results and pool the information.

> SO…. our research question was…"Will a weekly Student Feedback card and journal give me warning signs to which I could respond with the appropriate intervention to help reduce this rate?"

Materials were inexpensive and easy to acquire. College approval for this project was obtained through my immediate supervisor. Time wise... we were already having weekly class discussions for goals setting and evaluation, so this provided an opportunity to do this project without changing other programs and adding extra time to my or student schedules.

Research friends or support group were , of course, my students for without their support my efforts would be useless. I also needed my coordinator to be on board for past data collection, materials to be purchased, etc. And I needed support from other basic education instructors and my teacher aide to get their ideas and thoughts about procedures and results. In some cases interventions that needed referrals may arise, so I also needed the support of our councillor and outside community agencies.

My time frame was from Nov. 1 until Easter time. In this way students were somewhat comfortable with me and I could expect a degree of openness and as our college also has intakes at the end of January, I could assess new students as well because from my past experiences I have found that most students drop out in the first 6 weeks.

I set as my base line my previous horrendous drop out rates of 30% to 43% and my now

mounting one of 29%. Could this rate be maintained or even lowered.

Once I began the project, my fears of added work load were eliminated. Every week during our goal setting discussion I ask students to rate their week from 1 to 10 and make a short statement as to why they rated it as they did. I also ask them to turn in their journals for the week if they have not already done so. I gather them up and in less than an hour I have them entered in the computer and printed out a weekly graph. At the end of 5 weeks I make a comparative graph using individual average rating, class average rating and individual attendance percentage. I also keep a journal of the weeks results.

> By doing this I have discovered all kinds of information:
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> 1. Students tend to rate their week on academic achievement.
> 2. Ratings usually correlate with attendance.
> 3. Low attendance usually is a result of personal factors such as illness, family issues or financial problems.

SO... if I find low ratings and high attendance, we look at programs or classroom procedures and behaviours. Interventions such as re-evaluating goals, switching classes or programs, testing for Learning disabilities, etc. are tried.

If I find low ratings and low attendance, we gain information from the journals or discussions with the student. Once the problem is addressed we try other interventions. For example, one girl was trying to work 2 part time jobs and go to school. A visit with the councillor and an application for PTA allowed her to continue. Another example was a girl who suffered from migraine headaches. Once discussed, a small space with low lighting and anti-glare computer screen helped with this problem.

RESULTS are positive. I haven't had a drop out since November 1st and to date with my new student intake my percentage has dropped to the lowest ever...23%

Although our project will not be done until Easter, when all 9 of us get together to compile our results I have learned so much from this experience.

> 1. Research can be done on an individual basis.
> 2. It does not have to complicated and require hours of work.
> 3. It can be used to help find out answers to problems in individual classrooms.

And as you can guess, it is a tool I will use in my classroom in the future.