

Individualized Group Instruction (IGI) A Reality of ABE

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Individualized Group Instruction Introduction

- What is it?
 - Classroom model where learners work independently on materials which were assigned by the teacher based on diagnostic testing. The teacher assists learners as needed, keeps records and assigns additional materials.

Individualized Group Instruction

Introduction

- Characteristics:
 - Learners working independently, with teachers assisting as needed;
 - Heavy dependence on materials (usually commercially produced, sequential and leveled by difficulty);
 - Initial placement, by the teacher, into materials by means of diagnostic testing
 - Progression through the materials monitored by mastery testing.

Individualized Group Instruction Introduction

■ Characteristics

- Often in a setting where more traditional instruction could take place – a group of learners who meet at regularly scheduled time and place with a professional teacher.
- Different from tutoring because there is not one-on-one interaction for the entire time.

Individualized Group Instruction Introduction

- Where is this model used?
 - ABE, GED and Pre-GED
 - NOT ESOL – the context is different

Individualized Group Instruction

Research Questions

- Why do the research?
 - Because, although common, this model is not well described or researched and, we believe, very common.
 - Nearly invisible in professional literature.
 - Research grew out of our experiences at the Labsite.
 - If we do not understand and acknowledge what actually happens in classrooms we can neither understand what changes are needed nor effectively implement change.

Individualized Group Instruction Research Questions

- Objectives of the research:
 - Describe IGI and some of its variations.
 - Trace the history of its development – where did it come from?
 - Identify the factors which contribute to the continued use of IGI.
 - Identify issues in IGI that warrant further research – including ways that IGI may or may not support student success.

Individualized Group Instruction Methodology

- In-depth interviews
 - 19 interviews
 - Respondents had long tenure in ABE and experience with IGI
 - Range of 3 to 50 years experience
 - Most between 15 and 20 years
 - Respondents were current and former teachers, staff developers, program administrators, state level administrators (including former state directors) researchers and instructional material vendors.
 - A range of opinions on IGI were represented.

Individualized Group Instruction Methodology

- Interviews cont'd.
 - Interviews were taped, transcribed, and then analyzed for common themes.
 - We used the data from the interviews to understand both the history of IGI and the issues around using IGI.
- Extensive literature review
 - Focused on history and development of IGI

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- IGI evolved as a pragmatic response to longstanding structural issues in ABE.
 - These issues (e.g. continuous enrollment/sporadic attendance, multi-level classes, staffing) are systemic and extremely difficult to change. They have been around since the beginning of ABE.
 - IGI relieves the pressure like a pressure valve in a steam contraption.
 - There are other newer and more innovative instructional approaches that also address ABE's unique issues but IGI is pervasive and unexamined.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Longstanding structural issues:
 - Open entry/Open exit and sporadic attendance
 - Difficult for teachers to manage
 - Don't know who is attending on any given day.
 - IGI handles by:
 - allowing teacher to pay attention to new learners while existing learners continue to work;
 - not penalizing students who miss classes – they do not fall behind;
 - minimizing planning needs and therefore frustration when plans have to be scrapped.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Longstanding structural issues cont'd.
 - Multi-level classes
 - Teachers have to handle huge range of learners in a single class from basic to advanced.
 - Teachers may have to work in content areas where they feel less prepared (Especially math).
 - IGI handles by:
 - having each learner work on materials at their level;
 - having much of the content taught by the materials.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

“It (*IGI*) allows classes that, or it allows you to offer instruction that you might not be able to do otherwise...The only way that you do this and have it be efficient in any way, or even cost-effective, in terms of public resources, is to cluster all of those people, to put them all into one room ... the only way you can gather together twenty students for a class is to have students at a variety of levels with a variety of needs. And so, administratively have this kind of an approach allows you to create “classes” where you might not be able to do it if it had to be a specific group type experience” (interview 6 – 25 years experience, 15 teaching and 10 administration and staff development)

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Longstanding structural issues cont'd.
 - Staffing issues
 - Most teachers are part-time, high turn-over
 - Few are paid for prep time
 - Generally minimal opportunities for professional development and colleague to colleague interaction
 - IGI handles by:
 - being heavily materials dependent;
 - allowing new teachers to step into a class with minimal disruption;
 - not needing extensive lesson planning.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

"It (*IGI*) doesn't take a lot of skill, and it doesn't take planning. And that's key... because most of us in adult ed. are part time, and a lot don't get paid for prep time. ...You know if I worked at 11, I got there are 2 minutes to 11. And I wasn't sitting home here, on my volunteer time, planning stuff. Well, sometimes I did, but I never had to. It's something that you can do without having to plan." (Interview #10 – 20 years experience in ABE 17 as a teacher, 3 in staff development)

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Forms of IGI
 - 100% IGI
 - Can be classroom based or learning lab
 - Modified or hybrid classes
 - With small group activities
 - Often fluid and impromptu groupings
 - **MOST COMMON VARIATION**
 - With whole group activities

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- How prevalent is IGI?
 - Has not been studied as a such because it has just been defined
 - Informal email survey of state directors of adult education (14 respondents) indicated that all states had some programs using IGI. Estimates ranged from 15% of programs in one state to 95+% in other states. Most states estimated greater than 50% of programs utilized it. Indicates that IGI is common but varies by state level policies.
 - National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs – NEAEP (1992) found that individualized instruction was used by over half of the programs surveyed.
 - Exactly what is meant by individualization is not clear

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

History – Where did IGI come from?

Coincidence of the timing of

- Initial federal funding for ABE (mid-1960's);
- Popularity of behaviorist approaches to education such as programmed instruction at that time;
- Wide-spread adoption of adult education theories of andragogy and the self-directed learner.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- History of IGI cont'd.
 - Initial federal funding for ABE was passed in 1964 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty
 - Enrollment in federally sponsored ABE programs
 - 1965 – 38,000
 - 1967 – 389,000
 - 1969 – 485,000
 - Prior to 1965, only eight states had significant ABE programs but by 1967 all fifty states and the territories had ABE programs in place.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- History of IGI cont'd.
 - Early federal teacher training institutes encouraged programmed instruction and the individualization of instruction. As those teachers went out into the field they took those ideas and adapted them to the realities of ABE, and IGI became part of the fabric of ABE. It became institutionalized and “how things were done”.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- “My impression is that it (IGI) was there from the start. It’s a kind of chicken and egg situation. Things have been there from the start. Nobody told me that they consciously went over to this model, which they call the learning lab model. It coincided, there were funds in the 60’s for Adult Basic Education. It coincided with a philosophy in adult education about individualized instruction, seeing adults as self-motivated people whose individual goals needed to be the driving force for the instructional plan and the curriculum. Most of that research came from higher education, Malcolm Knowles and the like. Also, that whole movement at the time, the learning lab, the emphasis on skills, the whole behaviorist sort of mindset about learning and the fact that learning could be reinforced by sitting and encountering content and so on. So, I think it just happened that various things coincided at the time Adult Basic Education began to be publicly funded. That’s my guess.” (interview 7 when asked when IGI started – 25 years experience 16 as a teacher and 9 in administration and staff development)

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Issues in IGI
 - What kinds of learning and teaching opportunities are available with the IGI model?
 - Structural solution not an instructional solution – space for either intensive learning-teaching interactions or minimal ones.
 - Demands on teachers – easier or harder to teach than traditional methods?
 - No one is taught to do IGI
 - Community
 - Decrease in learner-to-learner community.
 - Increase in teacher-to-learner connection.

Individualized Group Instruction Findings

- Issues in IGI cont'd.
 - Waiting
 - Learners stopped because they need help.
 - Teacher stress knowing learners are stacked up.
 - Materials – vital in IGI
 - What are the learning opportunities in the current materials?
 - Can they be made more suited to IGI?
 - Types of learners who are suited to IGI

Individualized Group Instruction Implications

- Practice
 - Identified a gap between research and practice.
 - Those in professional development should consider if teachers are working in this model and work from there.

Individualized Group Instruction Implications

- Policy

- What type of classroom model is being used is rarely considered in policy decisions. This should be reconsidered.

Individualized Group Instruction Implications

- Further Research
 - How prevalent is IGI really?
 - Better understanding of the variations within IGI.
 - If IGI is going to continue as a model then how can it be improved to foster student success?
 - More classroom level research in the ABE context. Currently most research is at the level of the individual (learner or teacher) or at the program or state level.