

September 2006 – February 2007 Appendix B

End of Course Summary

(Note: The detailed reports (mid-point and final) on this workshop have been prepared for the General Manager of HCWSA. This abstract is presented as a brief recap of the entire project and, with permission is made available to educators and other professionals who have expressed interest in the project.)

The Southeastern Center for the Enhancement of Learning, SCEL, contracted with the Henry County Water and Sewerage Authority, HCWSA, in September 2006 to provide a 50-hour (later revised to 46) Cognitive Enrichment Workshop for twenty management level employees. The goal of the workshop was to improve the participants' independent thinking and problem solving skills. The workshop was conducted by Dr. Martha Wood and Dr. Joyce Swofford, using Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (IE) as the primary curriculum. Selected pages from ten IE Standard Instruments were used. The core of the workshop is from the Fast Track program designed by the International Center for the Enhancement of Learning Potential (ICELP) specifically for use with business and industry. The instructors added to and deleted Pages from the Fast Track program in order to best meet the unique needs of their participants. The classes met once a week for five months for 2-3 hours in one of the HCWSA training facilities, a location which was conducive to both whole class instruction, to cooperative group interaction, and to individual mediation.

Participants were provided with a loose-leaf notebook containing information on key theoretical concepts and with a folder for the exercise Pages. The folders were distributed each session, along with the Pages to be completed. The exercises were done in class with mediation provided by the instructors. After class, the folders were collected, divided into two groups of ten, and taken home by the instructors to be checked. The ten folders alternated between the two instructors so that each participant received feedback from both instructors. Pages were checked off as completed (no errors) or feedback was given by written notes and/or mediation at the next session. At the beginning of each session, participants were given a little time to correct incomplete pages and receive individual mediation. An individual Progress Sheet was used by both instructors and participants for recording date of completion for each Page. (A copy follows this summary.)

A written Overview of each Instrument was used to introduce the Conceptual Basis of the Instrument, and handouts related to the topics under discussion were given for placement in their loose-leaf notebook. Group activities were a significant part of the workshop and were usually scheduled as a synthesizing or a culminating activity after all Pages from an instrument had been completed.

Attendance based on the number of sessions attended was 85% and on the number of hours was 86%. Attendance was strongly encouraged by the General Manager and all absences were accounted for. Absences were primarily because of job related responsibilities, but some were due to previous vacation commitments, family situations, or illness.

The dynamics of the group were noticeably different from those in a pure academic setting in at least two areas: understanding of the terminology and perception of the relevance of the Instrument Pages to their work day responsibilities. Although all participants had a high

level of knowledge and skill in their respective areas of responsibility, the participants (with the exception of the Human Relations Director, who had an academic background in psychology) were not familiar with what we called the “language of thinking.” Difficulty with understanding and remembering the new vocabulary was cited by several participants. Also, the relationship between the skills developed in the course and their on the job skills was not at first apparent to them. However, on the end of course evaluation only three of the twenty participants disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, “As the workshop progressed, I gained a better appreciation for how the cognitive skills relate to my day-to-day work.”

The California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) was administered as a pre- and post-test. There were three significantly statistical outcomes: the total scores and two subscale scores for Evaluation and for Inductive Reasoning. All significances were positive and therefore represented improvement. The most significant improvement was on the Inductive Reasoning subscale ($p= 0.001$). We were pleased with this result since the mental operation of reasoning inductively is a key to independent thinking and problem solving, which were our stated goals.

The measures of the End of Course Evaluation Instrument were overwhelmingly positive (88.5% marking “agree” or “somewhat agree” to the statements). With only a few exceptions the participants seemed to understand how they could benefit from the course. For the instructors, it was also a positive learning experience that was both challenging and rewarding.