DEVELOPMENT,
DEMONSTRATION,
AND DISSEMINATION:
CASE STUDIES OF SELECTED
SPECIAL PROJECTS IN
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

By: HAROLD W. BEDER and GORDON G. DARKENWALD

Syracuse University
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#### **FOREWORD**

Many individuals contributed toward making this study possible. We would like first of all to acknowledge the generous assistance of the directors and staff members of the following Special Projects: Communi-Link, at Colorado State University; RFD, University of Wisconsin at Madison; Texas Guidance and Counseling, University of Texas at Austin; the Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory ABE Project in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Chinatown English Language Center, New York City; the Lumbee Regional Development Association Adult Education Project, Pembroke, North Carolina; and the Program for the Spanish-Speaking Community of the Washington, D.C. public school system.

We owe a special debt to two of our colleagues: Aliza K. Adelman, who assisted the authors in the original research, and Jack Mezirow, who directed the overall project of which this study was one component. Both colleagues worked closely with us throughout the duration of the original investigation. Alice M. Frederick, of S.U. Publications in Continuing Education, typed the camera-ready manuscript and helped with copy-editing.

Harold W. Beder Gorden G. Darkenwald September 1974

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#### INTRODUCTION

In the last decade the field of adult basic education (ABE) has experienced rapid growth and development, a situation largely attributable to the advent of federal funding, first from Title IIb of the Economic Opportunity Act and then from the Adult Education Act of 1966. A national program for educating adults with less than an eighth grade education was a new and ambitious undertaking; framers of the Adult Education Act therefore included Section 309 (b) authorizing the Commissioner of Education to allocate between 10 and 20 percent of all monies appropriated to ABE for special experimental and demonstration projects. Section 309 (b) states that the purpose of these projects is to:

- (1) involve the use of innovative methods, systems, materials which the Commissioner determines may have national significance or be of special value in promoting effective programs under this title or
- (2) involve programs of adult education...(that) have unusual promise in promoting comprehensive or coordinated approaches to the problems of persons with basic educational deficiencies.

Between 1967 and 1974 expenditure for such experimental demonstration projects, popularly known as 309 (b) projects, has amounted to a substantial governmental investment totaling \$48,082,569.

Projects funded through 309 (b) have little intrinsic value; their worth depends on their ability to improve the practice of adult education, a benefit which can only occur if the outcomes of 309 (b) are in some way utilized by others. For utilization to occur, however, effective dissemination of 309 (b) output must take place. Given this truism, it seems important for adult educators to understand the reasons for the successes and failures of 309 (b) dissemination, an objective to which the following case studies are addressed.

# Background of the Research

In 1972 the Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, received a USOE research grant to determine if widespread utilization of 309 (b) project output was taking place, and if not, why not. In this study the authors conceptualized the 309 (b) program as a three-part social system joined by interorganizational linkages. The interdependent subsystems were the Office of Education, specifically the Division of Adult Education, the 309(b) projects themselves, and the main intended users of 309 (b) output, local ABE programs. The Office of Education determines 309 (b) funding policy; that is, what problems will be addressed by 309 (b)

projects and what institutions will receive grant awards. Staff of the 309 (b) projects conduct research, development, and demonstration activities and sometimes disseminate results; the local ABE programs are the major intended users of project outcomes.

The case materials presented here have been excerpted from the section of our research report dealing with the 309 (b) subsystem. The projects were studied by analyzing documents such as reports, proposals, and evaluations; through personal interviews with project staff and others knowledgeable of the projects; and through inspection of project output, such as curriculum materials.

Each project was visited by field researchers from the Center for Adult Education. Generally, a field visit began with an interview of the project director, who was asked to describe the project's history, dissemination activities, and any problems associated with dissemination. After the initial interview, other key project staff were interviewed. When all available data had been collected from project staff, attempts were made to interview persons who were not staff members but who were familiar with the project; for example, state adult education directors, project clients, and advisory board members. The time spent in the field largely depended on the size and complexity of the project and ranged from one man-day to eleven man-days. After data had been assembled from field visits and documentary sources, they were analyzed and organized into the following case studies.

The case study approach employed here has both advantages and drawbacks. A major advantage is that they are valuable in sensitizing readers to the problems encountered by the organizations scrutinized and to possible solutions. The reader can imagine himself in the place of the organizational actors, simulate the problems encountered by them, and work through possible solutions in the abstract.

The main disadvantage is that the results of the case studies cannot, and should not, be generalized to the population as a whole, in this instance the entire 309 (b) system.

PROJECT RFD: USING TV TO REACH UNDEREDUCATED RURAL ADULTS

RFD (Rural Family Development ) began operating in 1970 and was funded for three years for a total of \$708,000. In general, the first

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year was spent in planning and developing television shows and materials. The demonstration was conducted in the second year, with the third year devoted to dissemination and preparation of reports. The grantee was WHA-TV, an educational television station attached to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It has a viewing radius of about fifty miles.

As set forth in the first year proposal, the primary objective of RFD was the  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{NFD}}$ 

Development of a ... rural adult basic education and continuing education demonstration research project utilizing educational television, individualized home study instruction techniques and a personalized home contact instruction and evaluation plan ....

By combining these three elements, the university and State of Wisconsin propose to demonstrate a new approach to providing adult basic education courses for the rural disadvantaged.

The initial stimulus for establishing RFD was provided by a USOE "request for proposal" (RFP) which solicited projects utilizing television as an ABE delivery system. Once the RFP had been made public, a group of adult education professors and WHA-TV staff formed an ad hoc committee to develop a proposal. The committee decided that rural residents were a logical target population for a TV-based ABE program, since low population density often made it difficult to maintain conventional ABE programs in these areas. The proposal that resulted included the following objectives:

To demonstrate the effectiveness of an integrated television, home study, home contact and visit program for the rural ABE students.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the role of mass media in rural ABE programs.

To create a viable television-based, multi-media program usable in similar situations in other parts of the country.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of an interdisciplinary family and community oriented approach to rural ABE programs.

To involve large numbers of undereducated adults not now able or willing to participate in ABE programs.

To develop a program that will improve ABE instruction while maintaining the lowest possible cost-per-pupil.

To assist in the development of skills that can lead to new careers for home study aides and other staff members.

To demonstrate involvement of disadvantaged individuals in the development and implementation of such a program.

To develop participant skills in the basic fields of communication and computation while improving the capability of the target audience to exercise citizenship responsibilities.

To develop participant skills from present proficiency towards eighth grade and twelfth grade equivalency achievement levels.

As conceived, the RFD project was to contain six integrated components—the mediated system (radio and television shows), the RFD Newsletter, home study materials, the RFD Almanac, home visitors, and the RFD Action Line. The television shows were to create awareness of RFD and its materials. Home visitors were to further reinforce use of materials. Action Line and the Almanac were to build "bridges" between the RFD staff and the participants, while the Newsletter was to be the major external dissemination device. There is some question, however, about how well this intended integration was actually achieved. In their external evaluation of RFD, the Human Factors Research Laboratory of Colorado State University stated:

An attempt was made to integrate the components, but the integration was not effected well in the demonstration. There is little evidence that TV programs were designed to stimulate interest in materials in the content center. The home visitors and the participants we visited saw little or no connotation among the three components, except for the home visitor helping the participant obtain materials.

### The Mediated System

A series of twenty television broadcasts comprised the core of the mediated system. There are indications that some of the original authors of the RFD proposal expected the television shows to constitute something of an adult Sesame Street, where television would serve as an actual vehicle for teaching basic education. In actuality, however, the shows were designed to create viewer awareness of the RFD home study materials. Little in the way of basic education was dispensed via television. A TV segment viewed by the researchers, for example, included instruction on how to fix a screen door and featured Andy Williams telling of his

boyhood experiences in West Virginia.

At the outset, one problem encountered by the WHA-TV staff was that its intended viewers, undereducated rural adults, were not generally a part of the educational television audience. To overcome this problem, the project conducted an extensive promotion campaign prior to the airing of the shows. Advertisements were placed on commercial radio and television networks. Direct mailings explaining RFD were sent to rural families; support was also solicited from organizations representing rural adults.

The RFD programs seem to have successfully reached a large portion of the potential viewing population. A viewer survey conducted during the fifteenth week of RFD broadcasts indicated that 23.3 percent of the respondents had seen an RFD program. Of these, 14.4 percent rated the programs excellent, 69.5 percent judged them good, 13.6 percent said fair, and no one rated them poor. The survey also determined that many urban residents as well as rural people were watching RFD programs, and that the viewing audience was older than the average TV viewing audience. There were significantly more female viewers than males.

In addition to the above results, one project staff member indicated that viewer surveys also showed "the proportion of undereducated adults who watched the programs was roughly equal to the percentage of undereducated adults in the total population." This finding can be interpreted in two different ways. A critic might argue that the shows were not sufficiently focused toward the target audience. On the other hand, undereducated adults seldom watch educational television, and thus, the percentage who did watch represented a higher percentage than might normally be expected. Television is very difficult to focus selectively, because anyone who owns a set can tune in. RFD's experience may have identified an important side benefit to using television as an educational medium—persons other than the intended audience can tune in and participate if the programs meet their needs.

# Home Study Materials

In its original proposal, RFD indicated that the purpose of the home study materials was to "aid in the development of participant skills in the basic field of communication and computation," indicating a basic literacy approach. Yet, the materials actually developed and used were "coping skills" oriented (e.g., money management) and were written on the fifth grade level. Does this represent serious displacement of original goals? After all, how can a mediated system for "providing adult basic education courses for the rural disadvantaged" obtain these objectives by concentrating solely on coping skills? The answer, if there is an answer, may lie in the project's approach to the development of the RFD Home Study Materials.

The development process began with a search of already available ABE materials. It was determined that most of the existing ABE materials were not suited for RFD's purposes, since they were sequential in nature—a student who used them was necessarily committed from beginning to end. Confronted with this discovery, RFD decided to create its own materials. A needs survey was therefore administered to a sample of undereducated rural adults. The results indicated that those questioned were most interested in a coping skill focus. Regardless of the needs survey results, however, an issue remained. As a respondent in the Wisconsin state ABE department put it, "No matter how well a person copes, he still has to read."

All materials were written at the fifth grade level because the project did not have the resources to produce materials at all levels. Though perhaps necessary, this decision may have been unfortunate in that it effectively eliminated the least educated from participating in the project.

The content of the materials was developed by rewriting other literature such as extension bulletins and basic human relations publications. A staff member designed some of the content himself. The home study materials were packaged into five volumes termed "Content Centers": "About Me," "About Me and Others," "About Me and My Money," and "Me and My Community."

Each RFD participant was sent an order card from which he could select whatever items he desired. He could start anywhere in the series. The reading matter was periodically alluded to in the television series, though there was no attempt at a hard sell. In its external evaluation, Colorado State University questioned whether the television series effectively motivated the use of materials. Nevertheless, there was a great demand for them, so great that supplies were quickly depleted. No priority system was instituted to insure that undereducated adults would receive materials first. Consequently, while some persons without real need received the publications, undereducated participants were often delayed in beginning the program for lack of them.

A publisher was sought for the home study materials, once they had been field-tested. Bids were solicited from a number of publishers; four indicated interest. The Steck Vaughn Company of Austin, Texas was ultimately selected. It is often claimed that publishers are reluctant to publish ABE materials because the market is "thin," but RFD had no difficulty securing a publisher. In the opinion of the RFD staff, publishers were enthusiastic about the readings because they were polished—well conceived, well put together, and physically attractive. RFD was able to produce literature of such polish in part because they were able to draw upon the

University of Wisconsin School of Journalism for the needed expertise.

RFD's experience has shown that there are both advantages and disadvantages to commercially publishing 309 (b)-developed materials. An advantage is that, in seeking a profit, a commercial publisher is motivated to market and disseminate materials long after the 309 project has terminated. On the other hand, commercial publishers will not generally publish reading matter unless it is protected by copyright. Because of USOE publishing regulations, RFD could not distribute free large quantities of its materials. Once they were published, copyright laws prohibited local ABE programs from reproducing them by Xerox or other copy processes.

# Home Visitors

The Home Visitors were a central component of the RFD system, and in terms of cost per participant, the most expensive. Home Visitors were assigned to fifty RFD participants, a sample selected for the manageability of its size. Though it was originally thought that Home Visitors would serve in an instructional role, this idea was discarded early in the first grant year. As it turned out, Home Visitors served as confidents and friends. They were to act as a bridge between the RFD "content centers" and the participants, and were to help the participant with any problem he might have, educational or otherwise. In short, a Home Visitor was to be a personal, one-to-one representative of RFD. Her most important function was to stimulate and motivate use of the home study materials.

Criteria for selection of Home Visitors included experience in relating to rural undereducated adults, a warm personality, articulateness, and tolerance. Eight Home Visitors were selected, and each had a case load of six or seven participants. All Home Visitors were women who were trained by the project and reported to a supervisor.

One project respondent quite familiar with Home Visitor activities said:

The way I saw it, the Home Visitors were the only thing that made RFD work. These adults would not even have watched the program if it hadn't been for the Home Visitors—they are not the kind of people who would watch Channel 21. You have to have somebody who says it's important....TV by itself is not enough. TV had very little influence on our people; they watched it because we wanted them to.

One of the problems Home Visitors encountered was the scarcity of materials. They were often in the position of apologizing

for the project's failure to maintain an adequate publications inventory. Another problem was the short duration of the program - twenty weeks. Many Home Visitors found it difficult to establish rapport and accomplish their objectives in that period of time. Although it was a secondary objective, Home Visitors were instructed to bring basic literacy and computation skills materials to their participants if they requested them. Very few requests were registered.

At the end of the twenty-week home visitation period, an evaluation of the Home Visitor component was conducted. Home Visitor participants and a control group of similar participants who had viewed the TV programs, but had not received home visitation, were administered a test developed by the University of Wisconsin. This test measured verbal skills, numerical skills, and coping behavior. No significant difference was found between the performance of the treatment and control groups.

# Action Line

The action line component was an attempt to provide a link between RFD's viewer-participants and the centers. When an RFD viewer experienced a problem and called the action line number, volunteer workers noted the problem. If the problem could be solved on the spot it was, but if it required referral it was channeled to the relevant agency. Action line calls were followed up to make sure the caller had actually received help from the referral agency. In total, action line received 1,641 calls, 85 percent of them either requests for RFD materials or simple enough for volunteers to answer directly.

### The RFD Almanac

Like the action line, the <u>RFD Almanac</u> was an attempt to increase contact with participants and to motivate participation in RFD. The <u>Almanac</u> was a monthly tabloid newspaper containing practical information and RFD promotional literature. It was sent to anyone who expressed an interest in participating in RFD, to those who contacted action line, and to adults referred by county and local social services offices. In all, 3,300 persons received the Almanac.

### The RFD Newsletter

The <u>Newsletter</u> was one of RFD's major external dissemination devices. It was sent to professional people--local ABE directors, state ABE directors, congressmen, and educational TV professionals. Over 2,700 names were included on the <u>Newsletter's</u> computerized mailing lists. Anyone who contacted RFD for information was automatically added to the mailing list. There were thirty-six issues of the <u>Newsletter</u>.

The <u>Newsletter</u> included descriptions of the RFD components, comments on the RFD design, both pro and con, and evaluative data gathered by the university.

### Issues

A major issue raised by the operation of RFD is that of goal displacement. Originally, RFD was supposed to be a media-based ABE project stressing basic communication and computational skills. Yet, in actuality, the project generally ignored basic literacy while focusing on coping skills and their media presentation. Although it is an open question whether this change in focus was beneficial or detrimental, necessary or unnecessary, it is important to consider why the change in focus occurred. At issue here may be the question of whether the project should have been controlled by media specialists or professional adult educators.

The original RFD proposal resulted from a committee comprised of both media people from WHA-TV and adult educators from the University of Wisconsin. After the project was funded, however, authority for grant administration rested with WHA-TV. The project director reported to the WHA-TV station manager. Though his Bachelor's degree was in adult education, his advanced degree and working experience were in mass communications. In an interview he stated, "I prefer being situated in the Communication Center rather than the Education Center."

RFD staff maintained input from adult education professionals through an advisory committee comprised of professors from the University of Wisconsin Education Department, persons from University Extension and from the State ABE Department. RFD staff seemed to agree with several committee members that the advisory committee did not have a really significant input to the project after work began. An RFD central staff member stated, "We work closely with adult education specialists (i.e., the advisory committee), as well as with client groups. We usually find the latter right and the former wrong.... The professionals, however, are helpful politically."

RFD staff found the adult educators helpful in facilitating the formation of connections with other influential persons in adult education, but did not take the committee's professional advice very seriously. One member of the advisory committee, an official of the State Education Department, recounted an incident when the project staff asked the committee why RFD had not been supported to a greater degree by ABE personnel within the HEW region. Another committee member responded, "This staff with all its enthusiasm has never heard what this committee had to say." Another member of the advisory committee stated, "They (the project staff) should

have immersed themselves more in the cruddy work of low literacy and less in the polished work of television."

The foregoing data suggest goal displacement which may have resulted from giving the media aspects of the RFD project predominance over the educational aspects. On the other hand, television is a highly sophisticated medium requiring great production skill and experience for effective use. Had the adult education professionals been in control of the project, the quality of the basic delivery system may have been impaired. In most people's minds the purpose of the project was primarily to test the mediated delivery system.

# Dissemination

Project RFD undertook an extensive external dissemination campaign aimed outside the WHA-TV viewing area. One respondent stated that, "They (RFD) did more dissemination than any other project I know of." RFD's dissemination vehicles included the already-mentioned RFD Newsletter, a series of workshops, publications in professional journals, site visits, presentations at national conventions, and a final report. Of these, the Newsletter and the workshops probably reached the greatest number of people. Workshops were held in all HEW regions. On the average, 800-900 people were invited to each workshop, though attendance averaged fifty persons. The low number of attenders may have been caused by RFD's policy of not reimbursing participants. Workshop participants were selected by inviting all those on the Newsletter mailing list plus others nominated by the Office of Education and various professional associations. One RFD staff member commented:

In the second year we had the apparent problem of overdissemination. We got some negative feedback from people who thought we were engaged in a fantastic national program of publicity. Nothing was further from the truth. The negative feedback came from members of NUEA, AEA, and the Commission of Professors. The positive response was strong.

This staff member was primarily referring to dissemination carried out by the <u>Newsletter</u>. The <u>Newsletter</u> was very candid, reporting criticisms of the project as well as accolades. One issue, for example, reported the basic literacy versus coping skills controversy described earlier. So candid was the <u>Newsletter</u> that one respondent observed, "They talked too much about things they should have shut up about."

An important distinction to note is that, in their dissemination efforts, RFD concentrated on conveying general awareness information about the project rather than on securing replication of the

demonstration. RFD is not a project easily replicated on either the state or local level, since a television station as well as considerable funds would be needed. Moreover, though the RFD TV segments have all been videotaped in self-contained units, they include many specific references to the WHA-TV viewing area. Thus, if another program wished to use the TV sequences, these local references would have to be edited out and other locally prepared segments substituted.

It might be feasible for some local programs to adopt portions of the RFD system, an adaptation of the Almanac or other materials, for example. Yet, the project was designed to test an integrated ABE delivery system, and replication of the entire system is far beyond the means of most ABE programs. Use of RFD products has not gained currency even in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin state ABE agency has never used or recommended use of RFD materials. A state education official gave the following reasons: "There are no steps or procedures that an ABE program can follow to adopt RFD products. RFD products are too expensive; and there is doubt that RFD products would be suitable for the ABE target population."

Another issue related to dissemination was summed up by one respondent as follows:

RFD has never been validated as a system. Only the Home Visitor component was evaluated, and it was evaluated separately. Is it worthy of dissemination? We don't know. Should we bother to disseminate an unproved product? But for validation you need vast amounts of money, and in adult education there is little RFD money, money for product development and testing. This is very unfortunate.

In the initial development of the RFD proposal, the Wisconsin state ABE director was involved. She also served on the advisory committee. There was, however, no conscious effort by RFD to include local ABE programs in the project in other than an advisory capacity. This lack of operational involvement with local ABE programs is perhaps explained by the fact that RFD was not designed for local ABE programs. The project director stated: "In our dissemination effort we aimed at the decision-makers rather than directly at the ABE directors. Our real purpose was to set up a national project; our real aim was to reach a mass audience." The project director then went on to explain that from the very beginning he had hoped RFD would "go national." Midway through the project an effort was made to form a consortium of midwestern states to replicate RFD on a regional basis. The consortium never came to fruition, as it did not gain enough support among the states. RFD never did go national, but a vocational education offshoot program, Project 360°, received a national commitment from the Educational Television