

Abstract

Using TV411 in a Facilitated Group

Jerome Johnston, Leslie Isler Petty, and Shannon Young

Institute for Social Research • University of Michigan

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TV411 can be accessed by ABE adults in many ways, from watching and studying at home to engaging the materials as part of a course in a formal classroom. This study examines the use of TV411 in a Facilitated Group. In this model, a group of learners meet and study the TV411 materials on a regular basis. A facilitator helps the group engage the materials, helps individuals identify skills which they want to improve, and facilitates students helping each other develop those skills. The facilitator does not “teach” a curriculum in the traditional sense.

The goal of the study was to determine the type and size of impact possible with this delivery model. The study was divided into two parts. In the first part (Spring-Summer of 2000) four groups were recruited from the New York and Pittsburgh areas. Group meetings lasted two hours. Meetings were held twice a week for ten weeks, totaling 40 hours of meeting time. Forty-five ABE adults started the program; 37 stayed for the entire ten weeks.

In the second part (Winter of 2001) 37 participants were recruited from a group that had been denied admission to a GED prep program because their reading and math scores fell just below the cutoff levels. Participants were promised admission to the GED prep program if they completed an intensive version of a Facilitated Group program dubbed Prelude to Success. The students were divided into two groups that met much more frequently, but for the same total of 40 hours. Thirty-four completed the Prelude to Success program and enrolled in the GED prep program.

Taking all 71 participants together, the Facilitated Group experience had a positive impact on attitudes, confidence and educational plans. The TV411 shows and workbooks used in the test promote 24 literacy activities such as using a dictionary, writing in a diary, writing an essay, and figuring out everyday math problems ranging from estimating to calculating a percentage. Over the course of the 40 hours of meetings participants increased their expectations that they would engage in 17 of the 24 activities in the following week or month.

Each activity represents a skill—e.g., the ability to use a dictionary or estimate the total in a shopping cart. As a result of watching and practicing these skills in the Facilitated Group learners showed increased confidence that they could do the skills, with larger-than-average increases observed for confidence related to writing an essay, writing a letter to a business, writing a poem or song, using a thesaurus, changing a fraction to a percent, calculating an average, figuring out the price of an item on sale, and knowing what to include in a resume.

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Approximately half of the participants in the first field test changed their plans for the future to include enrolling in school some time in the six months following the test. Students in the Prelude to Success program were already committed to continuing their education. They were followed through their first semester in the regular GED prep program and their performance was compared with a matched set of controls and with all other students in the program. Prelude students were much less likely to drop out of school than the matched controls, and their grade point average was as good or better than the matched controls.

All participants were tested to see whether they learned the various facts and procedures presented in the videos and workbooks. Baseline knowledge was relatively high (68% for math and 72% for language concepts), and learning gains were small—six percent for math concepts and 16% for language concepts. Learning factual and procedural knowledge may be secondary to participants' changing their literacy interests and increasing their confidence. But these changed literacy interests may lead them to engage the books and related activities that will enhance their knowledge.

The Facilitated Group shows great potential for enhancing the literacy life and educational attainment of ABE adults. But wider use of the model faces two challenges: (1) recruiting and retaining ABE adults to this non-traditional form of learning and (2) gaining acceptance for the outcomes fostered by TV411: motivation for learning.

Large numbers of adults need the attitude adjustment and confidence building experience of a TV411 Facilitated Group before they will willingly choose to enroll in school. But current reimbursement formulas for traditional adult education providers do not recognize this goal. Greater acceptance of TV411 by traditional providers might be achieved by pairing the Facilitated Group with traditional instructional programs in ways similar to the Prelude to Success program.

Executive Summary

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Jerome Johnston, Leslie Isler Petty, and Shannon Young
Institute for Social Research
University of Michigan

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TV411 is a unique set of materials for adult learners consisting of 20 half-hour television programs and companion workbooks that model and teach everyday literacy survival skills such as decoding difficult words, reading a map, writing a letter, estimating totals, and figuring out the cost of a sale item that has been marked down by a percentage. The series is designed for use in a variety of settings, ranging from traditional literacy programs to independent viewing in a home setting. This report describes the impact when the materials are used in a Facilitated Group. In this model, a group of learners meet and study the materials on a regular basis. A facilitator helps the group engage the materials, helps individuals identify skills they want to improve, and facilitates students helping each other develop those skills.

In the summer of 1999, the authors conducted a pilot study of the Facilitated Group model. The results were encouraging. After ten weeks of meeting weekly in a 3-hour session, many learners showed increased confidence in their academic skills. In addition, they learned many of the concepts taught in the series, were more inclined to engage in the literacy activities promoted by the series, and were motivated to pursue other educational opportunities after the intervention was over (Johnston, Young, & Petty, 1999). Based on this pilot study, a larger study of the effectiveness of the facilitated group model was undertaken. This report describes this effort and reports on the impact the experience had on participants.

Research Plan

The Facilitated Group model was tested in six groups between May, 2000 and June, 2001. Four groups were formed in Spring 2000, one each at the Bronx Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), the Brooklyn EOC, the Consortium for Worker Education (in New York City) and the Reemployment Transition Center (in Pittsburgh, PA). In this

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test, meeting time totaled forty hours. Participants met twice a week, two hours per meeting, for a total of ten weeks. Forty-five adults began the study; 37 completed the ten-week test. The research plan is summarized in the chart below.

Pretest	Intervention	Posttest
Baseline interviews & testing	Twice a week for 10 weeks, participants meet in a group with a facilitator. Each week they view a TV411 program, complete parts of the companion workbook, add to their portfolio, participate in group discussions and work in small groups on topics and skills they identify as personally important.	Follow-up interviews & testing

Two additional groups were held at the Brooklyn EOC in Winter 2001. These groups were part of a special test—called Prelude to Success—designed to assess the impact of a Facilitated Group on persistence and performance in a regular GED preparation program. Thirty-seven adults were identified who had applied to the GED preparation program for Winter of 2001, but were rejected because their TABE scores on either reading or math fell below the cutoff for admission to the program. They were presented with a special offer. If they agreed to study TV411 intensively for 2-1/2 weeks, they would be admitted to the next cycle of the GED prep program (Spring of 2001). These two groups met for three hours at a time, four days a week. Thirty-four students completed the Prelude program. The research plan for the Prelude groups was similar, but added another data collection point to obtain information on persistence and grades in the GED prep program.

Pre	Facilitated Group	Post	GED Prep Classes	Post-Post
Baseline interviews & testing	2-1/2 week intensive version of the Facilitated Group; same activities as above.	Follow-up interviews & testing	10-week semester of regular classes	Attrition and performance data from GED classes

TV411 is designed for adults over the age of 18 who are reading at approximately the sixth-eighth grade level. Almost all of the participants in the field test—both in the regular groups in the summer of 2000 and in the Prelude groups in Winter 2001—fell within these parameters. The average age was 36. Eighty percent had dropped out of school somewhere between fourth and twelfth grade. The remainder had a high school

diploma, either from the U.S. or from a foreign country. Most were women (60). More than half were single. All were lacking in the educational skills needed to improve their employment options.

In the Facilitated Group learners attended regular meetings where a facilitator helped them engage the materials and provided guidance when requested. In the course of every four-hour period participants watched one TV411 video, worked in the corresponding workbook, participated in small self-selected group activities where they worked on improving their skills and added writing and math items to their portfolio. The Facilitated Group itself became an element of the intervention along with the TV411 materials. The dynamics of the Facilitated Group are described in detail in the full report.

Impact of TV411

To assess the impact of the Facilitated Group experience, measures were developed that are tied to the developer's (ALMA) broad goals for learners and to the specific content of the ten videos and workbooks used in the studies. Each of the measures administered to the students was designed to tap the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that are promoted in the videos and workbooks and explored in more depth in the Facilitated Group activities. Before and after the study participants were interviewed in a 45-minute face-to-face session. They also completed tests of mathematics and word skills. Prior to the intervention, students took reading tests to ensure their reading levels fell within the range for which the TV411 materials were designed—approximately grades 5-8. During the course of the Facilitated group, students took weekly pre- and post-test quizzes that measured learning of content specifically covered in the videos. In addition, participants were asked to maintain a portfolio—a collection of their TV411-related work—which was later examined for evidence of learning.

What impact did exposure to the TV411 videos and workbooks have on the participants? We assessed impact by looking at changes in the participants over the course of the Facilitated Group in five areas:

- Knowledge of the key math and “word work” concepts
- Writing skills and literacy engagement, as seen in their portfolios

- Plans for engaging in the wide range of everyday literacy activities modeled on TV411 (e.g., write a letter, use a dictionary, read a book, make a budget)
- Confidence that they could perform these literacy activities competently
- Plans for further education

Knowledge of the key math and “word work” concepts taught in the TV411 experience. Participants registered an average increase on the math assessment of only 6% over the ten weeks. They showed a modest improvement on three of the four subsections of the test (percents, averages, and using charts). On the fourth subsection—reading a pay stub—participants already knew the concepts taught on TV411. Students showed greater improvement on the “word work” assessment that examined several structural components of words and dictionary usage (prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, antonyms, and knowing how to use a dictionary). Average scores on this assessment increased 16% from pre- to post-testing. Students showed improvement on all subsections of this assessment. These gains are small but important.

From what elements of the Facilitated Group do participants learn the knowledge? In the interest of testing the contribution of just the videos, participants completed a quiz immediately after watching each video. (They completed a matching quiz several weeks before watching the video.) The average gains on these quizzes was quite small, suggesting that while the videos play an important role in setting the agenda for learning, the workbook and classroom-based activities are essential components as well.

Writing skills and literacy engagement as seen in student portfolios. Students were required to keep a portfolio of their work throughout the class. This included workbook activities, other work stimulated by the workbooks, and work the student chose to do based upon personal interest. In the post interviews students expressed a great deal of pride in their portfolios. Most reported that the portfolio contained items they either would never have done, or would not have done as well, were it not for their participation in the project.

The portfolios varied widely in the quantity and quality of work they contained. On average, students completed most (~75%) of the activities in workbooks. Many portfolios included examples of their writing. Students occasionally did multiple drafts

of their work. Looking across drafts, most of the changes reflected correction of minor grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Plans for engaging in the literacy activities modeled on TV411. At both the pretest and posttest interviews, participants were asked about their plans to engage in each of the 24 literacy activities promoted in TV411—activities such as using a dictionary, writing in a diary, writing an essay, and reading a book for pleasure. The question asked whether they planned to do the activity in the coming week or month. If participants indicated a higher likelihood of doing the activities after the TV411 experience, this would be an indication that participation changed their attitudes about doing the promoted activities—even changed their disposition toward the behaviors. There was a significant increase for 17 of the 24 activities, with several activities showing quite large increases. For example, 25-36% of the participants increased their expectation that they would—in the next week—look up a word in a dictionary or write in a diary and—in the next month—write a poem or an essay. The TV411 experience clearly affected the interests and attitudes of many participants.

Confidence in performing the modeled literacy activities. In the videos and workbooks TV411 promotes many literacy skills, including using a dictionary or thesaurus, writing or editing an essay, and calculating an average. It was reasonable that students might have learned—from the messages in the videos, from their own successes in the workbooks, or from succeeding at the activities for their portfolio—that they could do things better than they had thought originally. In other words, it was reasonable that they would become more confident that they could be skillful in these areas. This indeed happened. There was a small average increase in confidence across the set of promoted literacy skills, with notable increases in confidence related to writing an essay, writing a letter to a business, writing a poem or song, using a thesaurus, changing a fraction to a percent, calculating an average, figuring out the price of an item on sale, and knowing what to include in a resume.

Plans for further education. The Facilitated Group affected the educational plans of many of the participants. Consider first the 37 people in the groups that met in the Spring and Summer of 2000. Half of them had plans to continue their education prior to

their participation. The other half added education to their plans over the course of the project.

The 34 students in Project Succeed were already committed to enrolling in the GED prep program at Brooklyn EOC. The key question for this group is how they would perform once they were enrolled in the GED prep courses. At the end of a full semester (ten weeks) of courses their performance was quite remarkable. Comparisons were made with a matched set of students who were identical, except their reading and math scores had been just high enough to be admitted to the program as regular students (called matched controls). Comparisons were also made with all other students in the pre-GED and the GED prep programs, most of whom had much higher scores on their reading and math than either the TV411 group or their matched controls. This group is called normal controls. In terms of attrition: 26% of the normal controls dropped out or failed by the end of the first semester. The equivalent numbers for the TV411 students was 36% and for matched controls 51%. In terms of grade point average, the groups were quite close: the normal controls had a final average of 80% across all their courses while the matched controls had 74% and the TV411 students 77%.¹ It was predicted that the TV411 students, with their lower reading and math skills, would have a lower GPA than the matched controls. Yet they did not. This is an important outcome.

Although the number of students in the test was small, the evidence supports the notion that a TV411 Facilitated Group not only gives adults more confidence that they will be able to handle traditional academic tasks, but actually prepares them to perform at a higher level than would be predicted.

Conclusions

The Facilitated Group model shows great potential for enhancing the literacy life and educational attainment of ABE adults. Its contribution to the educational success of marginal GED prep students is of particular note. This could make the Prelude model particularly attractive to agencies that offer formal training for the GED, but are experiencing high dropout rates from their program. The current reimbursement model in adult education ties reimbursements to demonstrating that participants in a program

¹ The only statistically significant difference was between the matched controls and the normal controls.

improve their “educational functioning” by one level during the time they are in a program. The motivational gains found for the Facilitated Group experience alone are not likely to meet this criterion. But, when used as a preparatory experience for an existing academic program, the time period for demonstrating the impact can be broadened to run from the beginning of the Prelude program to the end of one or more semesters in a regular pre-GED or GED-prep program.

It will be harder to gain wide acceptance for the Facilitated Group model outside of the regular school setting. The experience of the research team suggests that recruitment to a stand-alone Facilitated Group is a big challenge. It was very difficult to persuade ABE adults to join a Facilitated Group, even with a financial incentive. While those who completed a Facilitated Group reported that they valued the experience very much, the benefits are not obvious until a person has experienced the Group for some time, perhaps 5-6 sessions. It may be useful to establish linkages with organizations (churches, social groups, unions) that have an interest in promoting the improvement of their members, and that can recommend the experience to their members.