

TEACHER TO TEACHER

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Daily monitoring of students' learning requires strategic and organizational effort. It is not easy. If the monitoring is done only for the sake of accountability, it is likely to be an exercise in frustration for the teacher. Monitoring students' daily performance on the Standard Celeration Chart enables teachers to learn about their students' learning. After charting performance data for seven to ten days, a learning picture develops which gives us much more information than what happened on each day. Learning pictures give us information we can't get from teaching and observing. They confirm or deny our suspicions. They are tools for decision-making. I invest time and effort into monitoring my students' daily performance on their individual programs. However, I spend very little time agonizing over program decisions and make better decisions.

In my special education preschool classroom, myself and two paraprofessionals carry out program training and performance monitoring. We meet on a bi-weekly basis to look at learning pictures and make program decisions. If the learning picture is improving, we make a decision as to whether the acceleration is rapid enough to reach the aim in a short period of time. If so, a decision is made to continue without a program change. Sometimes a child's performance is improving, but the celeration line predicts it will take several months to reach the aim. Our preschoolers have too little time and too much to learn for that kind of leisurely gain. As a result, often we make changes in programs when improvement is very slow.

Programs with maintaining or worsening learning pictures are always examined and changed. For our handicapped preschoolers, we are generally looking for the most efficient learning channel set and the most powerful consequences. When one program has a maintaining or worsening learning picture, while all others are improving for the same child, we look at differences in the way we are teaching or differences in the programs. When all of a child's programs have maintaining or worsening learning pictures, we look at the child's total environment. Maintaining or worsening learning pictures across all of a child's programs have often reflected trouble at home.

There are two good references describing the use of the Chart as a decision-making tool. I will list them, rather than try to say what's already been well said:

- (1) **Teaching and Learning in Plain English** (2nd edition), available from Plain English Publications;
- (2) **The Washington Data Decision Rules**, available from Owen White, EEU-DCMRC, WJ-10, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195.

Learning pictures provide us with objective reasons for making decisions. They put the student's bad days in perspective and take the teacher's bad days out of the picture. An isolated low performance may be frustrating to a student, but charting that performance often shows it to be within average daily bounce. Learning pictures allow students to visibly monitor their own learning and not rely on us for their only feedback. Teachers are no different than other professionals. While we do not intentionally deceive, each of us has our own set of experiences and values that bias our views. It is more difficult to "see" progress in a child who, in the last few days, has used every inappropriate means possible to gain your attention, than in one who has been a model citizen. Our charts erase our subjectivity in the same way that laboratory tests confirm or deny a medical doctor's suspicions.

It is easy to base your program decisions on the learning picture when it confirms your hunch. It's much harder to make a decision to change when the learning picture looks nothing like what you "think" is happening. I've heard many people who are learning to make chart-based decisions say, "It doesn't look like it here, but I know she's about to catch on." I've said that myself, made a decision not to change the program and have subsequently been proven wrong many times. It's a little threatening to monitor learning, because it may prove our hunches wrong. On the other hand, it's ludicrous for us to think that those hunches alone can help us pick the best materials, learning channel sets, teaching strategies, and rewards for each individual student. I'm finding greater reward in knowing that I'm catching my mistakes than I ever did when I only "felt like" my students were learning.