

DATA-SHARING

Precision Teaching In Adult Basic Education,
Or Precise and Frequent Measurement as a Life-saving Device.

Mike Kaiser
West Fargo School System

I knew he must be tough because he arrived on a motorcycle that November night, wearing a jeans jacket minus sleeves. If not tough, then surely demented. Either way you looked at it, the homemade tattoos (LOVE on one set of knuckles, HATE on the other) made it clear that this was probably going to be one of my longest, if not my last, evening as an Adult Basic Education Instructor. Amazed by the fact that his bulk obscured the overhead lighting in my office, I nonetheless managed to blurt out, "Can I help you?" Deep down inside I had been hoping the answer was "no" and that he'd mistaken our building for the Wolf's Den Bar a few doors up the street.

"Name's Joe an' I'm here for my high school diploma," he said. A small ray of hope managed to shine through my despair. I was even starting to believe that when the end of class rolled around, I'd still be in one piece.

As Joe began to register he casually mentioned the fact that somewhere along the line he had failed to learn to multiply. I began to nod absentmindedly when almost as an afterthought he added, "If I don't learn this time, someone's gonna get hurt." I looked around the room. As I had feared, there appeared to be just the two of us. Joe did not seem to be into self-abuse; the conclusions were obvious. Fate had just snuffed out my ray of hope; hello despair!

In the few seconds that followed I began to make plans as to exactly how I would spend my time in intensive care, when all of a sudden I had a flash of inspiration! Desperate men -- desperate measures. For the past couple of years my good buddy, Skip Berquam, had been after me to give Precision Teaching a try. Because he's a good friend, I kept smiling and thanking him politely for the materials he'd been sending me, as I tossed them into the back of a file cabinet drawer. Now, if I could only remember which drawer!

Rummaging through file drawer after file drawer, I finally located the elusive Precision Teaching materials. Armed with only the multiplication mastery sheet, a Precision Teaching Chart, and a notion that this measurement stuff might actually work, I went forth to try and fix Joe's multiplication difficulties before he fixed my wagon. Precision Teaching was just what the doctor ordered. Joe decided that he would prefer to practice three times a week for a two-minute interval. Like the old "where does the 800 lb. gorilla sit...?" joke, I decided anything he wants would be

CALENDAR WEEKS

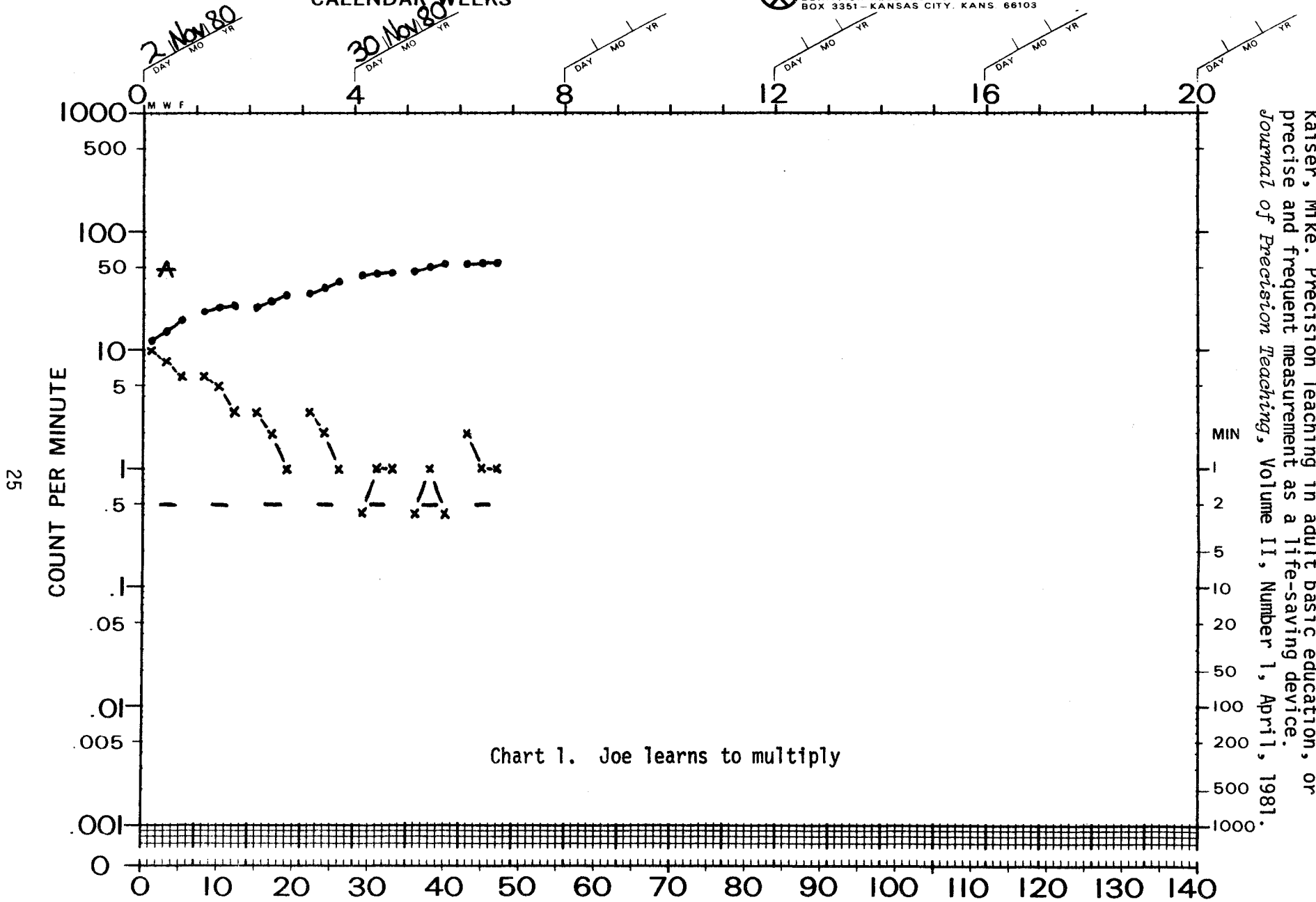


Chart 1. Joe learns to multiply

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 precise and frequent measurement as a life-saving device.
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M. LEIDAL	G. HAGEN	M. KAISER	SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR DAYS	JOE G.	ADULT BASIC EDUC.	WRITES ANSWERS
SUPERVISOR	ADVISER	MANAGER		BEHAVIOR	AGE LABEL	COUNTED
WEST FARGO SCHOOL SYSTEM			WEST FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA	TO MULTIPLICATION PROBLEMS		
DEPOSITOR	AGENCY	TIMER	COUNTER	CHARTER		

just dandy. I explained that we would divide the number of problems he did by two, giving us a frequency per minute. We set a goal of 35-40 problems per minute to begin with, and once I showed him how to chart his progress, he was off and running. Six weeks later his frequency of correct problems had risen from 12 per minute to 55 per minute, a frequency he is still maintaining. His errors had also decreased to near zero.

Looking back on this experience, it is difficult to believe that I had managed to ignore Precision Teaching for so long. The benefits of Precision Teaching are many and obvious. First, I'm still in one piece. Second, and perhaps most important, Joe is progressing rapidly on his math. By the time this article is published, Joe should be on the final leg of preparing to take the math portion of his GED (High School Equivalency Exam). As in the E. F. Hutton commercials, the message is coming through loud and clear. Regardless of your educational field, when a colleague talks Precision Teaching, it is a good idea to listen.

Mike Kaiser is the Adult Basic Education instructor, West Fargo School System, West Fargo, North Dakota.

A REQUEST

Dr. Leslie Weideman is interested in Precision Teaching techniques with infants. She is working in an early intervention program with developmentally delayed children from birth to three years of age. If you have information to share, please contact her at:

Child Development Center
593 Eddy Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02902
401/277-5681

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STANDARD GLOSSARY AND CHARTING CONVENTIONS**

- Accelerating Target--a movement the behavior. manager, advisor, or supervisor expects to accelerate; the frequency is symbolized by placing a dot on the Chart.
- Accuracy Improvement Multiplier--a measure of change in accuracy over time; celeration correct/celeration incorrect.
- Accuracy Multiplier--measure of accuracy: frequency correct/frequency incorrect; distance from frequency incorrect to frequency correct.
- Accuracy Pair--two movements, usually correct and incorrect, charted simultaneously.
- Add-subtract Scale--any measurement scale on which adding and subtracting by a constant amount is represented by a constant distance.