



Maryville Academy's Jen School and iRi Expand Successful Feuerstein Method Across 2008-2009 Curriculum

(October 2008) Following the introduction of the Feuerstein program in 2007-2008, the faculty at the Maryville Jen School, IL advocated for the program's expansion. The Jen program started Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (FIE) - STANDARD version for every student, everyday. As the teachers and students became more comfortable with the material, significant student progress was observed. Some of the students even began asking for more time with the FIE instruments. With the first year completed, the Jen School staff wanted to go to the next level. "The teachers began to see changes in the way that our students were thinking and needed to know where to go next," commented Dr. Craig Maki, Director of Educational Services.

In August 2008, the staff began their annual training in FIE. New teachers prepared to use FIE STANDARD Level 1 with certified trainer Monsignor James Gilg, who introduced the program at Boys Town more than 25 years earlier. Teachers who began using the program last year studied the next five instruments, STANDARD Level 2 with iRi Master Trainer Shannon Almquist. In September, school personnel assigned to work with the most challenging students prepared to use the BASIC level. Throughout the school year, iRi Vice-President Dr. Meir Ben Hur will join Almquist to visit the classrooms and coach teachers in follow-up conferences.

"This can be a difficult population of students, but changes are being seen. The principles of FIE are used throughout our program, and the students are improving," said Student Services Coordinator, Katie Bogacki.

The Jen School services three "groups" of students. The students are all male and between 12-22 years old. Many of the schools attended previously by the students did not have the resources which are needed to enrich their learning experience. The Jen School is their hope for academic success. Students may have cognitive difficulties ranging from mild to moderate, traumatic brain injuries, substance abuse issues, or emotional/behavioral difficulties.

One group of students are DCFS wards that have been identified as having mild to moderate cognitive delays (average IQs in the range of 40-70) along with emotional difficulties such as Bipolar Disorder, ADHD/ADD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Schizoaffective Disorder. They reside in a residential program on the Des Plaines, Illinois, campus where the school is located. Many of these students have been the victims of abuse and neglect in their lives and have had multiple living situations, i.e. foster placements and other residential facilities, before coming to Maryville Academy.

The Mental Illness and Substance Abuse (MISA) Program students have dual-diagnoses of mental illness as well as substance abuse issues. This is a Level III residential treatment facility. Most will have been involved with the court system for various reasons stemming from their substance abuse. The IQ scores of these students fall in the normal and above normal range; however, they are lacking in certain cognitive skills needed in everyday life. These students also live on the Des Plaines campus of Maryville Academy.

The third group of students served by the Jen School is referred through a local school's IEP process and who have not succeeded in their home school system for whatever reason. They can have any combination of mental illness, substance abuse, and/or emotional and behavioral issues. Cognitive functioning may be in the low to high range.

The most significant expansion of FIE will come with the cognitively delayed group. These students will receive two additional components of the Enriched Learning School: FIE BASIC and the Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD). The students determined (by reviews of prior records and faculty observations) to have the most learning potential will receive assessments with Feuerstein's Learning Propensity Assessment Device (LPAD). "This assessment will enable teachers and social workers to individualize their learning programs with mediation of FIE – BASIC and/or Standard plus even more," noted Kate Bellanca, Executive Director, National Center for the Enhancement of Thinking and Learning. "It will also enable us to better track student's improvements and design an intervention plan which identifies ways to transform the learning weaknesses into strengths by using Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience and Dynamic Assessment tools."

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