

# The Shado Box: A Case Study

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## Teaching Context

I teach ABE Skills for Life in an out state county jail for three hours, four mornings each week. My classroom has 13 students who have a wide variety of skills and challenges at any given time and, in the course of a month, I may see upwards of 45 different students.

## The Problem

Common among all students is that their relationship with me must end once they leave the jail facility; a rule implemented for the safety of any instructor. I have noted that there is a documented high degree of recidivism among inmates whose literacy skills are poor, that a calculated percentage of my students are considered “frequent flyers” at the jail, and that many of my students exit my class with established personal or court ordered goals but with little outside support to accomplish those goals.

One such student was a young man of 22, named Shado. I had been associated with Shado when he was a youngster through some of my other education and advocacy endeavors. . Multiple and under-treated diagnoses resulted in Shado’s leaving formal education when he was in fifth grade and into a lifestyle that landed him repeatedly in jail.

Shado and I reconnected in my classroom at the jail. As Shado’s release date approached, he admitted to me that he knew he would never make it through probation without help, and that no one he knew would help him. He had no clue how to access the necessary support services (including literacy classes) or how to coordinate those services, He had aptly described the confinements and obstacles of his **SHADO BOX**. At his request and with special dispensation from the Director of Jail Programs, Jo Carpenter, I was allowed to work with Shado once he left the facility. Preliminary planning began in January of 2004 in conjunction with the Practitioner Research Program and a two-year case study was born.

## Research Question

Considering the limited support given adults with low literacy skills after leaving the county jail, I formed this research question: **What happens to Shado’s reading level/skill when he is provided with comprehensive professional support in conjunction with 3 hours per week of reading assistance over a seven-month period?**

I was also interested in ongoing observations as to what happens to Shado’s physical and psychological health, his social interactions, his work history, his legal difficulties, and his level of independence given the same comprehensive professional support. The two-year study is conducted in three phases to reflect Shado’s two years of court-ordered probation. Phase I covered the period from January 1 – August 31, 2004. Phase II is from September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005. Phase III is from September 1, 2005 to March 31, 2006.

## **Data Collection**

Once approval was given for mentorship/instruction to continue outside of the walls of the jail, the primary focus was to begin assembling the comprehensive professional support team that would be most suited to Shado's needs and most accepted by him. This would come to include a psychologist, medical doctor, dietitian, psychiatrist, probation officer, financial officer, and educator. Since many of the professional services required payment, either private or through insurance, Shado and I were prepared to submit his applications for medical assistance, food support and social security disability on March 15, 2004, the day he was released from jail.

Shado's educational, medical and legal records were compiled for assessment review, to aid in deciding teaching strategies, and to support his social security disability application. As each assessment unfolded, the additional information was used to develop educational approaches and treatment approaches unique to Shado's preferences and learning style.

As his instructor I met 3 hours a week with Shado to work on basic skills. CASAS pre- and posttests were administered.

A Progress Journal was kept by this research practitioner to record trials, stories, successes and frustrations. A resource directory is rapidly being developed. Substantial one on one time with Shado was recorded in Phase I of this study in order to have all of the assessments underway, to address his basic social needs, and to begin literacy instruction that was held an average of three hours per week.

## **Data Analysis**

CASAS pre- and post-test scores were compared. Observation, self-evaluation and journaling were also data.

## **Findings To Date**

In the eight-month period from January 1, 2004, to the end of August, 2004, Shado's CASAS reading level did not change. His CASAS pre-test was higher than his actual ability as noted by this researcher's observation and by Shado's admission to guessing.

What did change was his ability to utilize phonetics, his increased recognition of sight words, and his self-reported increased interest in picking up reading material.

Significant time was spent in meeting as scheduled with his probation officer, securing adequate housing, helping Shado to arrange a work schedule that allowed for all of his required assessments, treatments and education and finding resources and funds to support the assessments and resulting treatment. It is the opinion of this researcher, advocate and instructor that there has to be an easier and more streamlined means to access needed supports. Shado could never have relayed his saga to the general public, let alone write about it. The twists, turns, and inconsistencies in the system were often mind-boggling to this researcher who has no doubts that many people who lack sufficient support just plain give up and fall back into what may be considered a dysfunctional way of life just because it is easier.

## **Next Steps**

Phase I is ending with the final social security disability interview taking place on Friday, August 20. Shado was able to pass his permit test and is taking his driving test on Wednesday, August 18.

Shado shows that he is eager and committed in his reading lessons by being on time and by seeking out, for the first time, reading materials that he can purchase and have in his home. Phase II will continue with the reading lessons, although a new schedule will need to be set to accommodate work, activities, and reading with the onset of his chemical use treatment. In this Phase additional focus will be on money management, food shopping and preparation, increasing community interest, vocational training and rehabilitation, increasing self-esteem, and re-grouping of friends and acquaintance.

Phase III, beginning September 2, 3005, and ending March 31, 2006, will also continue with reading lessons. Additionally, the current expectation is that it will also focus on aftercare, establishment of the “job of choice,” and problem solving.