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## **BACKGROUND**

Rae Knowles works as a reading teacher at the Essex County House of Correction in Middleton, MA. She was born and educated in England, and during that time she became an adult educator, teaching in several subject areas. After she emigrated to this country and before she obtained her green card, she volunteered to teach wherever she was needed. For the past six years, that place has been prison. Currently, she is employed at Essex.

Ms. Knowles’ classes consist of approximately ten men ranging in age from twenty-two to forty-five. Some of them cannot read at all. Others read at the first grade level, although some of these were able to complete the ninth grade in school. Most students come to her class because they want to learn to read; others are motivated to join her class because attendance affords them credit toward some privileges not otherwise available to them. No one is required to stay, however. According to Ms. Knowles, “No one drops out because the program is unsuitable,” although attrition is high for other reasons, such as transfers, other work obligations, etc.

## **REMEDIATION**

The reading classes meet daily in a classroom that contains five computers. Each computer is loaded with **Lexia’s Reading S.O.S. (Strategies for Older Students)** software. Because Ms. Knowles does not perform diagnostic testing, all of the students are introduced to the software, beginning with level one. She has found that although, to some extent, each student has unique problems, all of them seem to benefit from the drill provided by the Lexia program. For some students, she uses the Wilson Reading program one day per week in conjunction with the software that she uses every day. For others, the software alone produces improved readers. The common thread seems to be that these men “cannot break down words. They have good auditory skills and reasonable vocabularies but they don’t understand what they read. In some cases, they cannot even read the words. They have never been taught phonics.”

## **RESULTS**

Ms. Knowles has tried various other programs, but without success. A typical response from her students is, "I don't want to do baby stuff. Give me the hard program, the Reading S.O.S." She observes that, "they see the software as an adult approach, which stretches them as it teaches them. They love it. Many spend long periods of time working with it."

"One of our most successful students with Lexia's Reading S.O.S. software is a Cambodian man who could read, but who did not understand what he was reading," she continued. "He had no trouble understanding spoken English, however. By using the software, he was able to learn what the words he saw before him sounded like. It helped him decipher. Now he is *understanding* what he is reading."

From her point of view, Lexia Reading SOS is excellent. Not only are reading levels improved, but students can work independently. For grown men this is important. Many of them have never used a computer before. They feel successful in several areas. Their reading is improved; they can "teach themselves" by following the directions without help, and they are having a successful first experience with computers. It is a winning combination.