


1973

Teaching English as a Second Language at Two New York State Hospitals: Rockland State Hospital and Letchworth Village

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
AT TWO NEW YORK STATE HOSPITALS:
ROCKLAND STATE HOSPITAL AND LETCHWORTH VILLAGE

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B.A., Beaver College, 1971

"Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching
degree at The School for International Training,
Brattleboro, Vermont"

October, 1973

This report by Donice Horton is accepted in its present form.

Date Nov 13, 1973

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I. Introduction - Why TESL at State Hospitals?

Rockland State Hospital and Letchworth Village are two state hospitals in Rockland County, New York which employ large numbers of foreign staff members. Most of these employees work at the lowest level on the New York State career ladder (Grade 4) as ward attendants or house-keeping and dietary personnel since they do not know enough English to compete on examinations for higher positions. In an effort to improve their employees' opportunities for advancement on the career ladder as well as their performance in their current positions, the Departments of Education and Training at both hospitals decided to add another program to their offerings--English as a second language. Ms. Mary Jane Swan, consultant in staff development for the Department of Mental Hygiene in Albany, served as the program coordinator for the two hospitals and planned a six week TESL course for the period of July 2 - August 10, 1973. I was the instructor for this course and am presenting this report on my experience in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont.

II. The TESL Program at Rockland State Hospital

As planned, I lived on the grounds at Rockland State Hospital where I taught English as a second language in a modern classroom in the Catholic Chapel on Mondays and Fridays from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. The class had an initial enrollment of eighteen students, but due to summer vacation plans, actual attendance averaged about twelve to fifteen students a class session. Fifteen of the students came from Haiti and spoke French, two were from Colombia and spoke Spanish, and one was from central Europe and spoke Latvian, Russian and German. They ranged in age from the

early twenties to the early fifties and had been in the United States anywhere from one to four years at the beginning of the course. Some of them had not finished high school in their native countries while others were college educated and had given up professions in coming to the United States. Their reasons for wanting to learn English varied: some students wanted to learn English for personal daily living reasons; some hoped to qualify for a job promotion; some wanted to apply for U.S. citizenship; and a few attended class only because their supervisors insisted they attend. However, whatever their individual reasons were, as a class they were highly motivated and eager to learn. This, then, was an ideal group for a TESL experience.

Perhaps the major difficulty with the Rockland TESL program was that, out of necessity, scheduling had to be done according to the employees' work schedules rather than according to their language ability. As a result, we had ONE class consisting of students at the beginning AND intermediate English levels. It seems important to explain that the employees were attending class on "shared time." This means the employees were released from their jobs for one hour of class time and were paid for this hour, but they attended the second hour of class on their own time. Because this was an experimental program involving employees from many different departments of the hospital, and because they were creating a staff shortage while attending class in some cases, revising the initial scheduling of the class might have meant the end of the program. Several students needed to leave at 4:00 p.m. in order to catch their rides home, and an effort to accommodate these students by changing the class time to 2:00 - 4:00 created more problems than it solved. So, in trying to hold to the original class time while not disregarding

the marked difference in language readiness among the students, I attempted to plan activities which would challenge both groups of students.

It took the first three or four classes for me to realize how marked a difference in language readiness there was among the students. This was mostly due to my own inexperience and initial concern with establishing a good classroom atmosphere. Besides, the intermediate group was very responsive and active in classroom activities, and this tended to shade the beginners' confusion from me along with the beginners' apparently comprehending looks. It was not until I administered a relatively easy quiz on prepositions that I realized that one half of the class was virtually lost with what we had been doing. The ideal solution to this dilemma would have been to split the class in half and teach them at different times, but because of the above mentioned scheduling considerations, this was impossible. At first I tried slowing down but quickly saw that the intermediate students were losing interest. Next, I tried having the intermediate students help the beginners, but this failed mostly because of student personality clashes. Also, both groups expected the teacher to direct their activities more closely. Finally, it occurred to me to develop worksheets to provide a written application activity related to the presentation and oral practice. This gave the slower students time to master the new material at their own speed and to ask questions until they understood it. The intermediate students were able to move at a faster pace and to sharpen their skills by doing additional exercises. Both groups were able to work at their own speeds, ask questions of the instructor, and obtain immediate feedback on their work. In addition, those students who had to leave early could take their worksheets home if they were unable to finish them in class.

Constructing worksheets, which were mostly written exercises, took extra time, but it made the actual class time less exhausting. Unfortunately, there was less time for simulations and games, but where possible, these techniques were used for review of previous material at the beginning of a class. In this situation the plan of (review), presentation, oral practice, worksheets seemed to work satisfactorily.

III. The TESL Program at Letchworth Village

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays I was scheduled to teach two classes at Letchworth Village: one from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 M. and another from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. This schedule was also arranged to accommodate the employees' work schedules, and they, too, were attending class on "shared time."¹ In the Letchworth Village TESL Program, scheduling classes was more of a problem than mixed ability grouping even though surely by chance, these classes were basically grouped according to ability. The morning class had a total enrollment of six students, five of whom were at an intermediate level and one was at the beginning level. There were five students from Haiti and one from the Dominican Republic. They had been in the United States from one to four years, and only one planned to apply for citizenship. The others were merely interested in improving their English for communication reasons and for job promotions. Because these students were highly motivated and fairly homogeneously grouped, teaching this group presented little difficulty for the first three weeks. About the beginning of

¹ Shared time at Letchworth Village meant the first two weeks the employees received no money for classes attended, the second two week the employees received pay for half class time, and the third two weeks they received full pay for class time. This approach was aimed at giving the employees incentive to complete the course.

the fourth week, however, I was asked to tutor a Yugoslavian doctor who could only come from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 M. and who did not want to join the class for personal reasons. As a result, the morning class was reduced to a one hour session from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. This proved to be an unsatisfactory arrangement for both the students and the instructor since it cut in half what had been an adequate and well-grouped period of learning. Also at this time, student attendance in the morning class began to change. The student at the beginning level stopped coming during the third week of the course apparently because of an illness. After the class was shortened, there were never more than three students present and these three changed every day. The students offered various personal reasons for not attending, and Steve Wyde, coordinator of educational programs for employees at Letchworth, suggested that this was a fairly typical attendance pattern in other employee education programs. Whatever the reasons, the fluctuating attendance situation resulted in a need for constant reteaching and it made lesson planning chaotic. One day when I had planned to give an unannounced quiz on the simple past tense and proceed to a presentation on the past progressive, one student came to class. So we reviewed the past tense by having him tell me about how things were in Haiti when he was there and about a trip he had taken to Zambia. One class like this was tolerable, but after the class was shortened, we had several classes like this and the quality of the learning noticeably deteriorated.

The tutorial with the Yugoslavian doctor was also subject to scheduling problems, but these were related to his inability to leave his job. His last minute cancellations were a blessing since he was convinced he needed only to improve his pronunciation to be understood, even though

he had never formally studied English and was structurally weak. The challenging part of this tutorial was that he was in the process of getting dentures and had no front teeth, making speech difficult. Since native English speakers often have to re-learn how to make English sounds after getting dentures, it was obvious that he, too, would have the same problem. Thus it seemed futile to spend an hour teaching pronunciation drills with this student.

In spite of this, there were two main objectives I set for this student. One was to have him speak slowly, loudly, and without his hand in front of his mouth, and the other was to have him feel and see how various English sounds are made. The first objective was an effort to let him see how he communicated with others since he honestly believed the problem lay with the people who tried to understand him. He felt that they were either stupid or just not trying to understand. The second objective intrigued the student, and by using pictures of the vocal organs, a mirror, his cigarette lighter, and exaggerated facial expressions, we worked on sounds which were giving him difficulty. Since he never obtained his teeth, sounds such as [z], [s], [t], [c], [j], [θ], and [ð] still created problems at the end. Many consonants and vowels improved after three weeks, but it was most unfortunate that scheduling this student interfered with the 10:00 to 12:00 class.

From noon until 4:00 p.m. I stayed at Letchworth waiting to teach the 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. class. This class consisted of one Chinese, one Haitian, and three Korean nurses who were at an intermediate to advanced language level. After the first class there were never more than three students present. Most sessions averaged two students, and only one

student attended every class. Because the language level of these students was more advanced, it wasn't necessary to abandon the planned activities when only one student appeared. We worked mainly with listening comprehension and idiomatic expressions, using the Daily News, Robert Dixon's Essential Idioms in English (Regents Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), two taped stories, and some worksheets taken from a developmental reading skills book for fourth and fifth graders. Variation in class size was disturbing since a four hour wait at Letchworth for one student seemed unfair to the instructor. The transportation problems I had in getting a state car affected this class more than the morning class. Twice I had to cancel the afternoon class because I was unable to obtain a state car and had to be driven to Letchworth, and my only means of transportation back to Rockland State was a ride that left at 4:00 p.m. which necessitated cancelling the 4:00 - 6:00 class. Thus, at Letchworth Village, ability grouping was not a problem, but because of low enrollment, student attendance, and uncertain transportation, arranging classes presented problems.

IV. Overall Evaluation

So far this report has outlined the teaching situations at Rockland State Hospital and Letchworth Village, and it has focused on the problems related to the TESL programs at both hospitals. A discussion of these problems seemed appropriate since they were a large part of this learning experience. However, to avoid painting a purely negative picture, I would like to comment on the positive aspects of teaching English as a second language at these hospitals. First and of most importance, there is a substantial number of foreign adults employed by the hospitals who are very interested in learning English, and who obviously need to learn

English to meet their obligations to the hospitals. This is reason enough for continuing TESL programs at both hospitals and for considering this situation for future TESL field experience. In addition, there was active interest in and support of the TESL programs shown by Ms. Rosalynde Singerman at Rockland State, and Messrs. Steve Wyde and George Burstein of Letchworth Village. They willingly helped me every way they could and were invaluable in helping me deal with institutional problems.

Teaching English as a second language at Rockland State and Letchworth Village was a valuable field experience for me. It gave me an opportunity to teach adults in the United States and to experiment with different teaching techniques in an open atmosphere. As an Independent Professional Project, it gave me a different type of TESL experience to contrast with student teaching in Japan, where I taught junior high school adolescents in a highly structured English curriculum. Besides being a good field experience for the instructor, I believe a substantial amount of learning did take place. The students and everyone else involved with this pilot program have expressed interest in having another TESL program in the near future. It is with this end in mind that I include the following recommendations for consideration in planning another program. The problems we encountered in this pilot TESL program can and should be overcome in order to improve the quality of future TESL programs at these two hospitals.

V. Recommendations for Improving TESL Programs at Rockland State Hospital and Letchworth Village

A. Recommendations for improving the teaching program

1. Standardized testing - Both hospitals would benefit from having

some type of TESL test to be administered and used for diagnostic ability grouping and evaluation at the end of the program.

2. As a result of the testing, scheduling classes should be done according to language ability. Work schedules will invariably interfere, but the philosophy for scheduling classes should be with language skills first in mind.
3. Registration period - When scheduling students, there should be an established registration period for enrollment with a firm deadline.
4. Class size - Minimum class size should be established before beginning a TESL program with provisions to discontinue the class if it drops below minimum standards.
5. Tutorials - A policy on tutorials should be decided on in the beginning by the instructor(s) and the Department of Education and Training. An instructor should be able to decline tutorials which are private lessons rather than periods for helping students who have trouble with material already presented in class.
6. Actual class time
 - a. A certain number of hours should be specified for English class, and the number of hours should be spaced to provide optimal learning conditions.
 - b. Students at Rockland State requested five hours of English, one hour a day, five days a week.
 - c. Students at Letchworth Village requested six hours of English, two hours a day, three days a week.
 - d. It was generally agreed that five to six hours a week was a desirable amount of time for learning English.

e. If holding daily classes at Letchworth Village and Rockland State Hospital creates transportation problems, it would be essential to divide the class time so that students at both hospitals would have classes closer together...not as it was at Rockland State Hospital this year where one class was held on Monday and the other one on Friday. The students felt they forgot too much and had to wait too long for the next class.

7. Books and educational materials - Funds should be provided for at least one text book per student, if not for additional learning materials. Several inexpensive TESL paperback texts are available for \$2.50 - \$5.00 a single copy, and assistance in selecting a text could be obtained on request from the MAT Department, School for International Training.

8. Instructors - If possible, plans should be made for two instructors to conduct the programs.

a. Since TESL is a specialty, it would be helpful to the individual instructors as well as the program to have someone with TESL training to consult for idea sharing.

b. Providing there were enough students, classes could be divided with each instructor taking a class.

B. Accommodations for the Instructors

1. Orientation

a. Some type of orientation program should be developed to initiate the TESL instructor to state mental hospitals so that personal adjustments to living on the grounds come more easily.

b. Since this experience differs from most SIT-TESL experiences,

it is important not to forget that even though intensive language training isn't necessary, living at a state mental hospital is a cross cultural experience of a different type. The instructor should prepare herself/himself in a similar way to that used for going overseas...with an emphasis on imagining what the situation will be like.

c. Staff members at both hospitals should remember that TESL volunteers are probably less knowledgeable about mental hospitals and their operation than students working in the physical and occupational therapy fields.

2. Living Accommodations - If possible, arrangements should be made for the instructor(s) to live at Letchworth Village. There is less frequent contact with the patients there, the environment is less institutional and more cheerful, and the food far surpasses that at Rockland State Hospital.

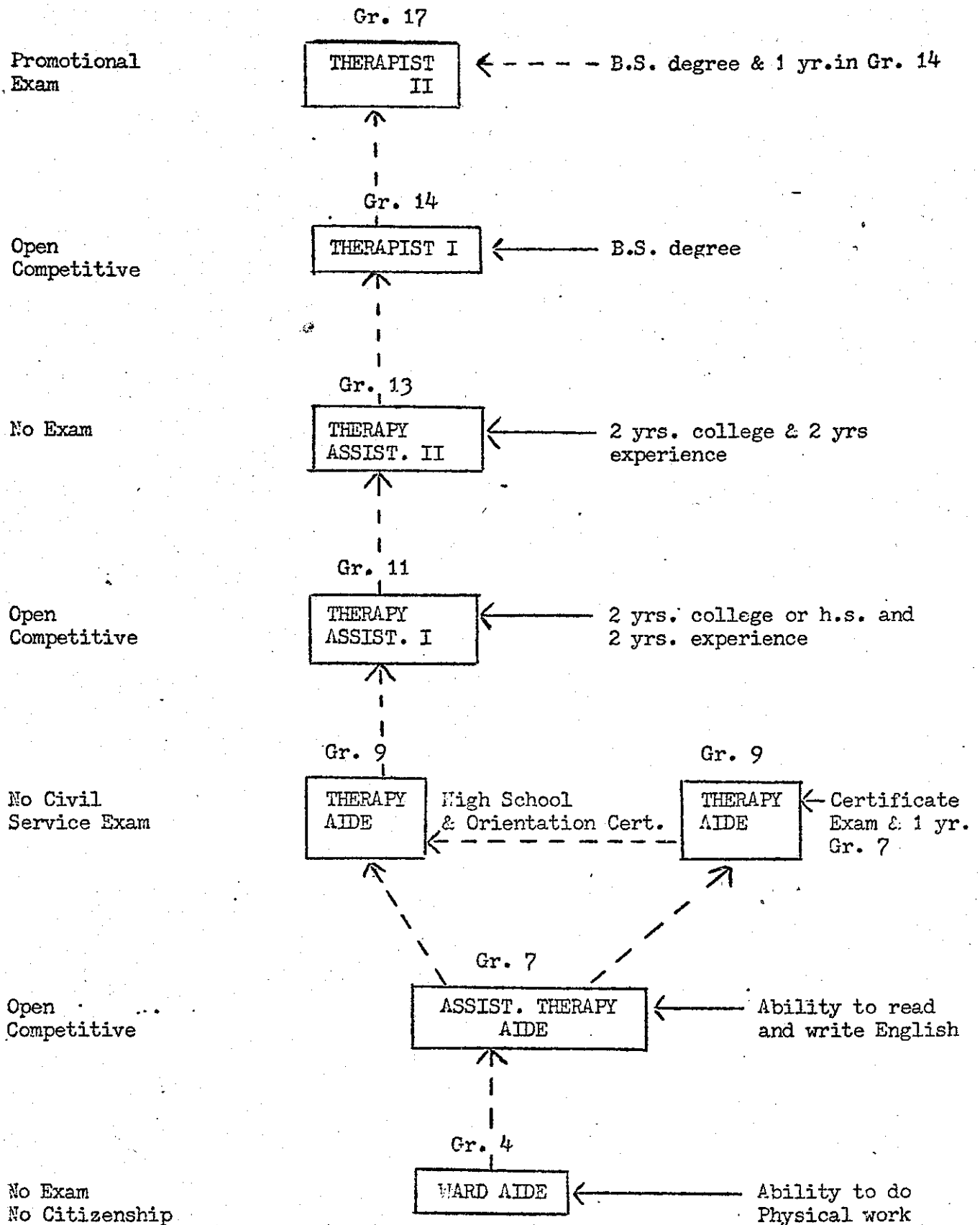
3. Transportation - It should be urgently recommended that the instructors bring a car with them. This recommendation is made with the instructors' personal stability in mind. Shopping centers, libraries and movie theatres are nearby, but to get to any of them from Letchworth, one needs a car. Public transportation is non-existent.

A short walk from the Rockland State Hospital takes one to a small shopping center which has a movie theatre, post office, delicatessen, liquor store, drug store, and other small shops. The Nanuet Mall which contains Sears, Bambergers, and many other shops is about a ten minute drive from Rockland, and there is a bus which leaves the grounds every hour for it. There is also

a bus which leaves Rockland State Hospital hourly for New York City, George Washington Bridge Station too.

4. Stipends - Arrangements should be made well in advance to allow for prompt issuance of all checks for stipends.

UP THE PATIENT CARE CAREER LADDER



PATIENT CARE CAREER LADDER

LEVEL I - MENTAL HYGIENE WARD AIDE (GRADE 4)

- QUALIFICATIONS:** Physical ability to do the work.
- ILLUSTRATIVE TASKS:** Housekeeping, custodial care duties, maintains supplies (non-medical), and assists in food serving, lifting bed-ridden patients, in changing clothing.

LEVEL II - MENTAL HYGIENE ASSISTANT THERAPY AIDE (GRADE 7)

- QUALIFICATIONS:** Pass Open Competitive Exam, U.S. Citizenship, ability to read and write English.
- ILLUSTRATIVE TASKS:** Participates in group meetings, recreational activities with patients/ residents; physical care
Assists in home visits or community facilities; performs care-related duties in clinics, day-care centers.

LEVEL III - MENTAL HYGIENE THERAPY AIDE (GRADE 9)

- QUALIFICATION:** High School Diploma or Patient Care Training Certificate.
- ILLUSTRATIVE TASKS:** Participates in group meetings, administers medication under supervision, observes patient behavior and reactions to medication;
Day-care center work with residents
Home visits with other staff
Assists with contacts with other agencies

LEVEL IV - MENTAL HYGIENE THERAPY ASSISTANT I (GRADE 11)

- QUALIFICATIONS:** 2 years College (AAS or AA degree) or, High School Diploma plus 2 years of experience.
- ILLUSTRATIVE TASKS:** Participates in planning treatment program, Supervision of other team members, Submits reports, Counsels patient/resident and family, Assists in daily living activities.

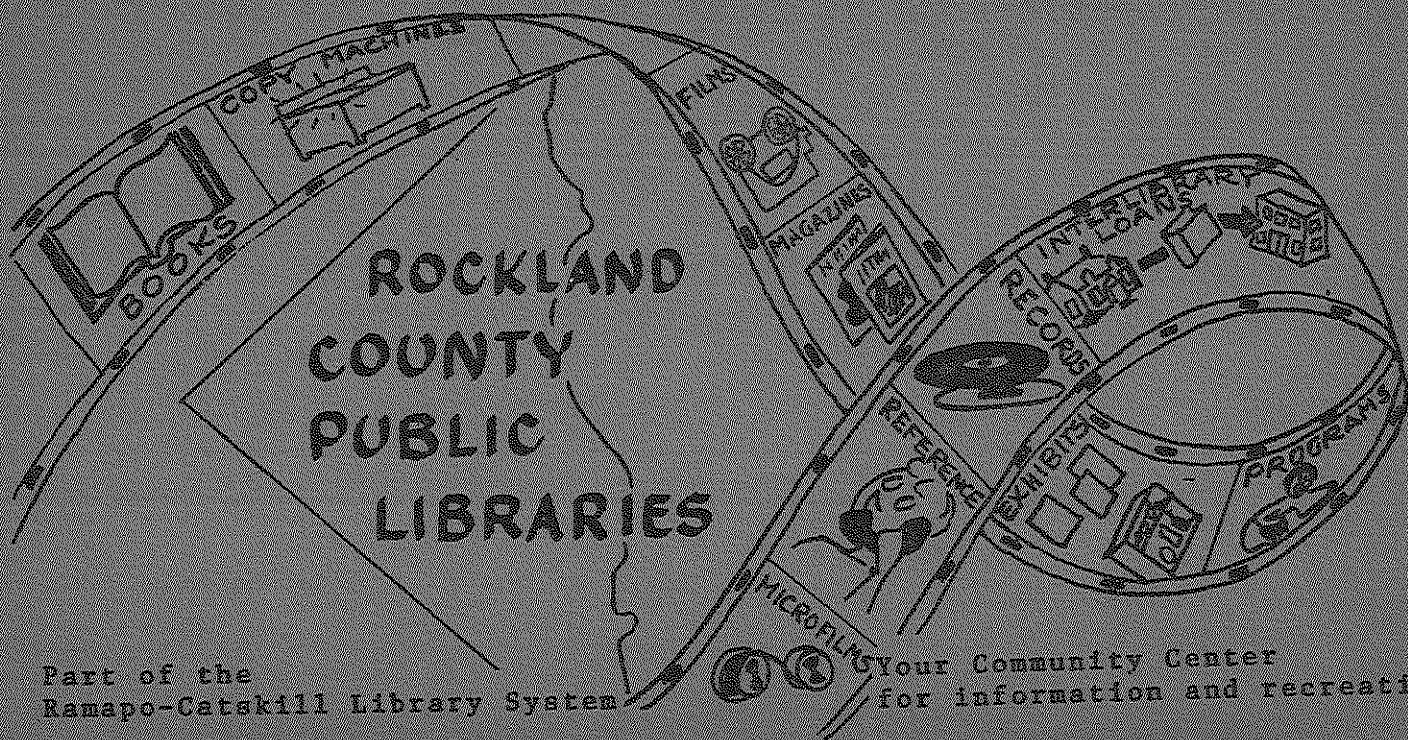
Pay Schedules

The following is the new base pay schedule for all employees except those in the security services negotiating unit. This schedule, which went into effect April 1, reflects the six and one-half percent pay increase.

Sal- ary Grade	Annual Incre- ment	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	Maximum Salary
1	\$ 237	\$ 5090	\$ 5327	\$ 5564	\$ 5801	\$ 6038
2	248	5295	5543	5791	6039	6287
3	261	5564	5825	6086	6347	6608
* 4	275	5827	6102	6377	6652	6927
5	289	6114	6403	6692	6981	7270
6	302	6457	6759	7061	7363	7665
7	315	6828	7143	7458	7773	8088
8	328	7219	7547	7875	8203	8531
9	343	7632	7975	8318	8661	9004
10	359	8079	8438	8797	9156	9515
11	375	8559	8934	9309	9684	10059
12	391	9049	9440	9831	10222	10613
13	409	9590	9999	10408	10817	11226
* 14	427	10155	10582	11009	11436	11863
15	445	10745	11190	11635	12080	12525
16	465	11359	11824	12289	12754	13219
17	489	12010	12499	12988	13477	13966
18	514	12705	13219	13733	14247	14761
19	537	13406	13943	14480	15017	15554
20	561	14105	14666	15227	15788	16349
21	586	14866	15452	16038	16624	17210
22	611	15677	16288	16899	17510	18121
23	638	16520	17158	17796	18434	19072
24	662	17411	18073	18735	19397	20059
25	690	18385	19075	19765	20455	21145
26	719	19364	20083	20802	21521	22240
27	744	20422	21166	21910	22654	23398
28	772	21510	22282	23054	23826	24598
29	802	22654	23456	24258	25060	25862
30	829	23850	24679	25508	26337	27166
31	857	25133	25990	26847	27704	28561
32	885	26486	27371	28256	29141	30026
33	911	27934	28845	29756	30667	31578
34	939	29437	30376	31315	32254	33193
35	966	30974	31940	32906	33872	34838
36	994	32544	33538	34532	35526	36520
37	1022	34261	35283	36305	37327	38349
38		31944				

* Grade 14 is the full time instructor's level.

Letchworth Village



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