

# EVALUATING TEACHERS' USE OF INSERVICE TRAINING

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Many school systems make a substantial investment of money and teacher time for inservice education. Unfortunately, little effort has been made to find out how much teachers actually use the information and ideas presented in such programs.

A Title I inservice program conducted in a western Maryland county by reading staff from the University of Maryland presented 14 ideas and teaching strategies (see Appendix A) related to the theme of "focusing on the strengths of children."<sup>1</sup> In the initial presentations, all the ideas and strategies were previewed. In subsequent individual and group meetings scheduled during the 1976-77 school year and following summer, detailed presentations, model lessons, and workshops provided more in-depth exposure and training. Teachers were advised to select the strategies that seemed most relevant for their classrooms and to try them out. Members of the University of Maryland staff made classroom visits to individual teachers who asked for assistance.

In the winter of 1979 University of Maryland participants and the school system decided to assess whether any evidence of the project still remained. The process involved identifying evidence of the teaching strategies through classroom observations and teacher interviews. Five observers were trained to use a three-point

rating scale listing the 14 teaching strategies that had been presented. During the training session they were familiarized with the teaching strategies and with the following criteria:



*Trace:* indicators or evidence of the strategy were visible in the room (a learning center containing newspapers might be considered a "trace" indicator of the functional reading strategy).

<sup>1</sup> L. Gambrell and R. M. Wilson, *Focusing on the Strengths of Children* (Belmont, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1973).

*In evidence:* indicators or evidence of the strategy were visible and were apparently being used (a center with newspapers and directions for an activity set up in the classroom but not in use during the observation might be considered an "in evidence" indicator of the functional reading strategy).

*Prominent:* indicators or evidence of the strategy were prominently visible or in use during the observation.

Thirty-one teachers were observed in four of the eight schools that had participated. Observers visited the classrooms for approximately 15 minutes and rated current evidence of the 14 teaching strategies. Totals ranged from zero to eight ratings per teacher.

Following this initial rating, classroom teachers were interviewed and their responses rated as above. This self-report strategy was used to ensure that the brief observation did not overlook strategies that teachers were using which were not immediately visible. Teachers were asked, "From the University of Maryland inservice in 1976-1977, what ideas or strategies are you now using or have you used recently?" Observers were cautioned not to prompt but were

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*Inservice leaders can  
follow up their programs by observing  
classrooms and interviewing teachers to  
see whether strategies are being used.*

instructed to indicate any comments in a special section of their rating sheet. If a strategy was rated during the observation, it was not rated during the interview even if the teacher mentioned it; interview notations were in addition to observations.

Figure 1 summarizes the number and percent of use of each of the 14 teaching strategies that were rated "in evidence" or "prominent." (Trace ratings were dropped as they were viewed as suspect.) At least one indicator for each of the strategies

was "in evidence" in either the observation or interview situation. Eight of the 14 teaching strategies were "in evidence" or "prominent" in at least 20 percent of the classrooms.

One particular advantage of this technique is its efficiency. Producing the rating scale, training observers, and collecting and evaluating data can all be accomplished with minimal expense in short periods of time. The data can be analyzed simply and reported descriptively. A plan such as this can easily be used by others to

determine whether evidence of particular strategies and materials is present in classrooms as a result of inservice training.

Inservice planners and school system personnel may also want to gauge more precisely the impact of inservice training. Although it was not done in the present study, collecting baseline data and assessing teachers' perceived needs prior to inservice education could provide the comparative information to answer this additional question. ■

**Figure 1. Number and Percent of Teachers Using Each Strategy  
(Rated "In Evidence" or "Prominent")**

Strategy	Observed	Interviewed	Total %
Functional Reading	8	0	8 26%
Personality of the Week	2	7	9 29
Paired Learning	2	1	3 9
Learning Centers	18	0	18 58
Instructional Games	15	1	16 52
Specific Comprehension	0	3	3 9
Contracting	1	6	7 23
Word Attack	4	1	5 16
Language Experience Activities	6	1	7 23
Newspapers in the Classroom	5	0	5 16
Diagnostic Record Keeping	5	8	13 42
Management Activities	6	1	7 23
Focusing on Strengths	0	1	1 3
Sustained Silent Reading	0	0	0 0

**Appendix A. Workshop Strategies and Teaching Ideas**

**Functional Reading:** activities dealing with the child's survival and/or "real world" reading demands and experiences (such as reading labels on food products, street signs, newspapers, and magazines).

**Personality of the Week:** to improve self-concept, one child is designated "Personality of the Week." The student's picture is posted and teacher and classmates compose messages describing the child's interesting positive features.

**Paired Learning:** students work as buddy teams to learn or practice skills.

**Learning Centers:** multi-difficulty, multi-activity materials including directions and a means of self-evaluation for independent work.

**Instructional Games:** teacher made or commercially adapted games to provide practice in previously taught skills.

**Specific Comprehension Strategy:** an approach to comprehension instruction involving students' identification of important ideas and supporting details in a passage they have read.

**Sustained Silent Reading:** a period of time during the school day when students and teachers read self-selected materials.

**Contracting:** negotiating and using a written agreement between student and teacher, specifying amount, time, study method, and means of evaluation for a designated piece of work.

**Word Attack:** system for approaching words that students cannot identify (say it, spell it, "beep" it, split it, ask someone).

**Language Experience Activities:** designed to enhance the effectiveness of the language experience approach.

**Newspaper in the Classroom:** use of the newspaper as the content of instruction (critical reading of advertisements for products; responding to classified advertising).

**Diagnostic Record Keeping:** organization, formats, and forms for efficient record keeping.

**Management Activities:** designed to encourage positive classroom atmosphere and student independence ("silent alarms" and other agreed upon signals to regulate behavior).

**Focusing on Strengths:** activities designed in such a way that students work from their strengths to develop areas of need.

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