

# Implementing the Coaching of Teaching

In Santa Clara County, California, teachers help other teachers refine their classroom skills.

Coaching, as defined by Joyce and Showers (1982), is in-class follow-up by a supportive advisor who helps a teacher correctly apply skills learned in training. While coaching is the best way to ensure the appropriate application of teaching skills, typical training programs neglect to provide coaching, perhaps because it is perceived to be logistically impractical, expensive, or threatening to the participant. Intent on overcoming these obstacles, a pilot Teacher Advisor Program was recently established by the Santa Clara County, California, Office of Education, an intermediate agency that offers, through its Educational Development Center (EDC), regional staff development programs for 33 local school districts.

EDC provides coaching to teachers who have completed one of two differ-

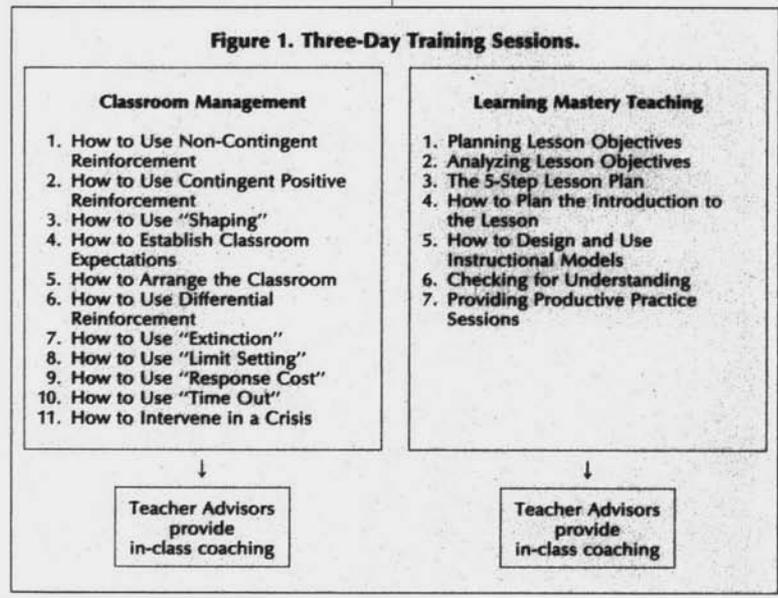
ent training programs: Learning Mastery Teaching and Classroom Management (Figure 1). Since they are offered to experienced teachers, these training programs strengthen current skills and add one or two new skills for each participant.

## Program Design

We and other EDC staff trainers in Learning Mastery Teaching and Classroom Management developed the Teacher Advisor Program. In designing the program, we had to consider a number of logistical problems:

1. Who would be eligible to serve as teacher advisors?
2. How many days could we request advisors to spend outside of their classrooms?

Figure 1. Three-Day Training Sessions.



3. How could we enlist enough school and district support for the program so that advisors could be released from classroom duty several days each month?

4. What would be appropriate compensation for advisors?

5. How would requests for advisor services be handled?

6. What relationship would advisors have to the formal evaluation of the teachers they observed?

After considering each question, we designed the program so that only teachers could serve as teacher advisors. This was to promote credibility, collegiality, and a sense of companionship. Advisors would provide services at a teacher's request, but not more than three days per month. School and district administrators were told that advisors would develop extensive training and coaching skills that could also increase their school's or district's capacity for improving instruction. All costs for substitute teachers would be borne by the EDC Teacher Advisor Program. In addition, each teacher advisor would receive a \$100-per-month planning stipend and reimbursement for mileage to school sites.

This program was designed for teachers who completed one of the three-day training programs and re-

quested an advisor; only volunteer teachers would receive the service. Although the principal at each school in which an advisor had been requested would be contacted as a professional courtesy, the program required that the coaching process and the teacher's formal performance evaluation be clearly separated. The relationship between the teacher advisor and advisee was to remain strictly confidential.

#### **Selection of Teacher Advisors**

Job announcements describing qualifications and duties were mailed to teachers' associations, district administrators, and local universities. We sought teacher advisors who had the ability to communicate clearly, interact positively with other teachers, and who had at least five successful years of teaching experience. We also advised applicants that the position required intensive training and that their duties would include planning and providing classroom follow-up to teachers, as well as observations and conferences with teachers.

Selection criteria included observation skills (describing behaviors in a non-judgmental manner), analytical ability (breaking down teaching behaviors into logical categories and drawing supportive conclusions), self-confidence (presentation both in writing and in the interview), creativity (ability to present a variety of solutions or ideas in response to a videotape of a classroom episode), flexibility (the ability to react to a given situation in many ways), interpersonal relations (ability to communicate clearly and positively), and responsibility (follow-through on commitments).

A panel rated candidates' responses in a personal interview. In addition,

**“The relationship between the advisor and advisee is strictly confidential.”**

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*Authors' Note: We wish to acknowledge the work of EDC trainers Elizabeth Houston and Judith Wallace, coordinators Kathie Hausauer and Beth Beggs, and all the Teacher Advisors. They are the people who "put theory into practice."*

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candidates were rated on their reactions to a simulated classroom episode. This required the candidate to view a seven-minute videotape, record classroom activity, and organize notes into logical categories. Candidates were then paired, asked to discuss their analyses of the class segment they viewed, and to agree on which items they would discuss should they hold an actual post-conference with the teacher. The discussion between each pair of candidates was videotaped and viewed by the rating panel, who gave equal weight to the interview and observation. This entire process was conducted in one day for 16 candidates.

As a result of the selection process, seven teacher advisors were chosen—three in Classroom Management and four in Learning Mastery Teaching. All were elementary teachers (K-8), the range selected for the pilot program.

### **Training Teacher Advisors**

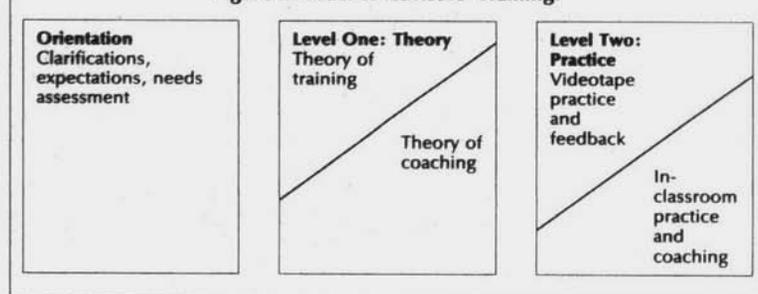
Training for teacher advisors began immediately. At orientation, the job description and expectations were clarified, individual training needs were assessed (some teachers were more sophisticated in their previous

training than others), and team-building was begun within the group. After orientation, each teacher advisor attended the appropriate three-day training program (either Classroom Management or Learning Mastery Teaching)—the same training their advisees would have completed before requesting their services. This was required of all trainees to maintain consistency in everyone's information base and vocabulary. This constituted the “content” part of their training program.

The “process” part of the training program was conducted at two levels. Level One began with instruction in what Joyce and Showers call the “levels of impact” that training can have. It then moved into the “components” of training, which are essential for attaining maximum training “impact.” Finally, Level One provided training in the phases of coaching: pre-observation conferences, how to observe and take notes, how to plan a post-observation conference, how to conduct a supportive conference, and the general skills of giving feedback while maintaining a supportive, collegial stance.

Level Two of the process training included simulated practice in the phases of coaching that had been

**Figure 2. Teacher Advisors' Training.**



learned on a theoretical basis in Level One. Trainees practiced each step of the coaching process using videotaped lessons, and were themselves observed and given feedback by the EDC trainers. After Level Two, each advisor was paired with a trainer for additional practice in observing real classrooms of volunteer teachers and conducting conferences with them (Figure 2).

### The Teacher Advisement Process

At the end of the three-day training in Classroom Management or Learning Mastery Teaching, the trainer described the availability of teacher advisor services and encouraged participants to request them. The teacher advisor called each requesting teacher personally and arranged a time for the pre-conference (which often included planning the lesson with the teacher) and observation. In the first six months of the EDC Teacher Advisor Program, 33 requesting teachers were involved, with a range of from one to eight visits per advisee.

Teacher advisors are expected to log all their visits, maintain their observation notes (strictly confidential), and communicate regularly with the EDC Teacher Advisement Coordinators who supervise the program. Separate meetings for all the advisors are held monthly to promote teamwork and group problem solving.

### Pilot Program Outcomes

The most productive outcome of the EDC Teacher Advisor Program has been that teachers who receive both training and coaching are implementing the trained skills *correctly* and *consistently*, as evidenced by advisor observation. This is especially signifi-

cant since the maintenance of a well-managed classroom and strong skills in direct instruction are the goals of the training objectives, which had heretofore only assumed we were successful in meeting.

Several factors interact to produce the successful implementation of training skills through coaching. First, there is accountability. A teacher who is expecting an advisor to visit the classroom will sincerely attempt to implement the skill. Second, there is support and companionship that develop between the advisor and advisee. Third, the process provides for specific feedback to teachers, so they truly learn whether or not they are implementing the skill correctly. And if they aren't, "re-teaching" can take place in their own classrooms.

The EDC Teacher Advisor Program has been strengthened by not only the organizational support of the intermediate agency in which it operates, but by the commitment of several other key groups. The local teachers associations have promoted the program, distributing job announcements and recommending applicants. School districts have cooperated in the same way; principals have encouraged teachers to apply and supported their participation even though three days per month of release time can be a major inconvenience.

The overwhelmingly positive feeling of advisees and advisors alike has been a welcome surprise. One advisee commented in her evaluation of the program, "This experience was an opportunity for renewing confidence and working again toward a positive foundation for both teacher and student." Another commented that it was the first time she received *any* supportive feedback in an 11-year teaching career. A teacher advisor said,

"The strategy can be dynamic in offering positive assistance to people with whom you are working. It is one of the most effective processes I have seen."

### The Future of the Program

Because the first year evaluation of the EDC Teacher Advisor Program was extremely positive, the seven elementary teacher advisors were asked to continue their services. In addition, five secondary advisors were selected to begin service during the program's second year. The pilot stage having been completed, the program is now an ongoing part of the EDC. Although this program is conducted through an intermediate agency, it holds great promise at the district level. As a result of this experience, the EDC will never again wish to offer training that does not include the element of coaching. We're that convinced of its power to effect change. □

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