

DOINGWHATWORKS



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Training Coaches/Mentors to Work with Teachers

Tempe Early Reading First Partnership, Arizona • June 2007

Topic: Preschool Language and Literacy

Practice: Use Interactive and Dialogic Reading

Highlights

- Training approach for mentors used by Tempe program
- Including teachers in planning for mentoring
- Mentors' role in developing effective lesson plans and modeling in different settings
- Principles for managing a mentoring program and training mentors
- Learning to provide effective feedback
- What to avoid when designing a mentoring program
- Clarity about roles of mentors and mentees

About the Site

Tempe Early Reading First Partnership

Tempe, Arizona

Demographics:

80% or more: Qualified for free or reduced lunch

50% or more: Spoke a language other than English at home

More than 10%: Received special education services

Site Highlights:

- Developmental approach that guides phonological awareness instruction
- Phonological awareness instruction integrated into daily center activities and transitions
- Systematic, explicit small-group instruction
- Differentiated instruction based on child's performance on curriculum-based measures
- Dialogic reading using PEER interaction strategies and CROWD question strategies, including distancing language and story retelling
- Targeted vocabulary
- Extensive professional development including classes/coursework; intensive in-classroom mentoring, including videotaping and observational rubrics; guided teacher practice in the classroom; and self and peer assessment
- Mentor logs used to develop modeling, observation and action plans, and guide feedback sessions with teachers

Full Transcript

My name is Shelley Gray. I'm an associate professor in the Department of Speech and Hearing Science at Arizona State University; that's in Tempe, Arizona. And I'm the principal investigator of the Tempe Early Reading First Partnership.

When we first started the project there weren't a lot of resources available for early childhood mentors, but we did use a book called, *The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum Handbook for Mentors*. We taught a class to our mentors and then for skills-based mentor training, we met weekly with the mentors, we previewed what the professional development would be, and they helped us, along with the teachers, develop and refine the skills checklist that we used for feedback and for mentoring trainings.

To help mentors come into a classroom situation where they're going to be where the teachers will be receptive, first you have to include the teachers and the teaching assistants, administrators, in the planning for the mentoring so that they're part of the goal setting. On site, our mentors and coaches have really helped teachers improve their skills. First, helping them, teachers develop effective lesson plans ahead of time, thoughtfully using the curriculum, pointing out a lot of teacher

resource books that can give teachers new ideas about fun ways to teach specific objectives. Another thing was to model teaching several times in different teaching settings—so, for example, model how you might teach the same objective to a large group of children and to a small group of children and then to an individual child.

So not just modeling it in one setting, modeling different kinds of teaching methods for the same skills. So, for example, if we wanted to teach initial sounds during small group it might be direct instruction, where the teacher's leading instruction. In a large group you might practice initial sounds during music and circle. And for individuals, as children are transitioning between activities, how you could give children practice identifying initial sounds as they're transitioning from inside to outside.

We've learned some key principles for training coaches and mentors, and for implementing a mentor program. First, mentors need a clear job description. They need to know exactly what they're expected to accomplish and how their own job performance will be evaluated. And then you need to train mentors how to do these things. You need to look for mentors who are flexible themselves, and you need to design your mentoring program so that it can be flexible; and it could change based on feedback from mentors and mentees. For example, in some of our professional development training we found that the way we were teaching teachers to do a particular skill wasn't very effective and the mentors knew this at the time. So they were able to feedback to us and we changed some of the format for the way we did training.

Mentors need to learn how adults learn. It's different from how children learn. And they need to learn how to provide effective feedback to mentees. And this can be very challenging because we all like to say only very nice things to people and have a good relationship. So it's a real skill to be able to provide effective feedback. We found that role playing feedback sessions with teachers and mentors both—so that teachers would know what to expect from a mentoring feedback session and mentors would know how to provide that—was really important. So everybody knew what was going on in feedback sessions. It wasn't a mystery or something to be hidden or not discussed openly.

We also need to help mentors refine their skills by actually observing their mentoring as they're doing it—observing their own feedback sessions, videotapes of mentors doing mentoring, so that they can improve their skills just like the teachers are improving their skills. And this implies that somebody needs to be in charge of mentors. And in a lot of situations in education, we don't have a lot of extra people around. So someone needs to be invested in mentor training and mentor supervision, just like they are for teachers.

Some things should be avoided because they just don't work very well. First of all, avoid starting a mentoring relationship if there isn't sufficient protected time for it to succeed. It takes time for mentors and teachers to meet and talk with each other. They have to have time when children aren't there to do it. And avoid mentoring a teacher if they simply don't want to be mentored. In many cases that happens because it's a misunderstanding of what the mentoring is about, or a teacher hasn't been involved in the planning of it or they think they're being singled out because they have poor skills. So how the mentoring program is developed is really important to that.

You shouldn't expect mentors to train and support teachers in skill areas they haven't received training in. So you might have a teacher who's very strong in a lot of areas and it looks like a great potential for being a mentor, but perhaps they received a lot of their teaching training 20 years ago and there are many skill areas that they need to be brought up to speed on before they can mentor someone else.

You have to be careful not to foster a dependency relationship between teachers and their mentors. There needs to be this social understanding of what the roles each of them will have and that mentors aren't teaching assistants. And even though they are very helpful and supportive for teachers—they collect materials for them, they do everything they can to help them be successful—they need to be clear about what their role is and that's to help teachers improve their skills. So there needs to be a kind of social distance between a mentor and a mentee. For example, if someone was tapped to be a mentor in a particular school district, and the year before that they were teaching side by side with someone, now this year they're supposed to mentor that person—that would probably be very difficult for the person to take because they feel they already know as much as the mentor, and perhaps it would be even embarrassing to both of them.

You need to be very clear about defining mentor and mentee roles and how both of those relate to the agency administration. If there's going to be a trusting relationship between a mentor and a mentee, the mentee has to feel free to be vulnerable and to admit they don't know things. And they might not feel comfortable doing that if they know an administrator is going to hear about it. So the ground rules for that really need to be laid out.

Know that just because someone is an excellent teacher, doesn't mean that they'll be an excellent mentor. Because it really requires different skill sets to mentor someone. You need to set ground rules for confidentiality that will really help a mentor/mentee develop trust, and there must be very careful adherence to not violating those confidentiality rules.

Also, mentors really need time to meet with other mentors. They need time to brainstorm. They

need to compare notes and they need to vent because they have a very hard job. So they need colleagues, just like all of us need colleagues, who face the same challenges they are dealing with. So that needs to be built into their job description and their job time.

And also, it's also good to mix up mentoring. In some cases, we had mentors who are very good at a particular skill so they mentored everybody on that skill. And then we also had classrooms that had a home mentor who always did the lesson planning in that classroom. So we all like to see how different people do things, so mixing that up's really important, too.

I think teaching people new skills and then having them become the teachers is a real key to sustainability. And also institutionalizing the things, the practices, so that you get your colleagues doing the same thing—that's another way to really help ensure sustainability.