

Building Teacher Capacity to Teach Reading: A Model Classrooms Approach

For the teaching of literacy to succeed for almost all students, even those who are challenging to teach, educators must apply the best understandings of effective professional development, such as the principles and practices recommended by the National Staff Development Council and the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching. Research has shown that single workshops unconnected to an overall plan of school wide improvement are ineffective. Likewise, the superficial treatment of complex information should be replaced by study, practice, implementation, and evaluation of instruction supported by research. Sustained and continuous professional growth toward effective literacy instruction is every educator's and every school's responsibility.

The primary goal of EB's professional development is building in-house expertise through establishing model classrooms. Effective model classrooms enable schools to sustain reliable and effective reading instruction beyond the involvement of EB. Teachers, new and experienced, have a powerful resource down the hallway to share, learn, and to continuously refine and hone their teaching practices. Educational Bridge will provide intensive instruction to model teachers whose classrooms will serve as modeling, coaching, and interactive teaching classrooms (e.g., for room design, activities, curriculum, and instruction).

These "model classrooms" become demonstration sites that other teachers will visit to learn more about effective teaching practices and to examine their own practice. Visits to model classroom sites will be facilitated by EB consultants and supplemented with activities to increase their effectiveness. A combination of teacher education, hands-on implementation, coaching in the classroom, modeling, and reflection provides a connection between theory and practice, opportunity for extended study and collaboration, expert mentors, and grounding in research and participants' inquiry — all those things we know work in professional development. Moreover, all teachers receive similar services during the project by attending monthly after school meetings and facilitated visits to model classrooms. EB staff works initially with model teachers at the start of the project, and then with all teachers in their classrooms when the model classrooms become operational.

This comprehensive professional development program helps build capacity and becomes a self-sustaining process of professional development for all teachers in the school. In addition to on campus services, EB provides continuous support as needed through internet provisions. EB uses GoToMeeting online services to augment on campus delivery of services. GoToMeeting is an online gathering place, where members can communicate via text chatting, synchronized browsing, application sharing, and voice-over-IP.

Educational Bridge's Model Classrooms: The on campus resource that fuels continuous progress.

Model classrooms designed by EB are intended to be eye-openers: by showing what is possible, they dramatically raise teacher expectations, producing better performance from teacher and student alike. Model teachers receive intensive training in EB research-based instructional methods and become on site models and leaders who provide support and direction to teaching peers. Model teachers and model classrooms provide a sustainable resource that has proven to keep high standards, expectations, and increased student academic performance for participating schools.



EB establishes model classrooms as the foundational basis for the professional development training program. Teachers receiving EB professional development training and coaching have the opportunity to observe successful classrooms and exemplary teaching practices in action, and can use this experience to hone their own practice. Teachers report that visits to model classrooms help them to grow both in skill level and motivation as they see for themselves what is possible in classrooms like their own.

A Results Oriented Process

Most EB model classrooms are located in schools in low-income neighborhoods with student populations typical to the area. These classrooms are evidence of the remarkable success of rich literacy environments, exemplary teaching, and high expectations for students. EB provides the teacher with training that is both intensive and sustained over time, and furnishes the classroom with quality teaching ideas for using children's books and literacy materials. The result is transformational: a classroom where students thrive in an environment of support and challenge.

Schools involved in EB Customized Professional Development consistently report gains in student achievement, motivation, and ability to think deeply about text. Most recent reports from EB Model Schools in 2010 (April, 2010 fifth grade high stakes state reading test results reported to EB thus far) have shown gains in student achievement scores ranging from 15-40 points, and significant increases in the number of students passing the test. Reports from schools using the EB approach over the years have consistently shown similar gains in high stakes test scores (results available on request).

A Customized Approach to Building Teacher Capacity

Educational Bridge (EB) partners with schools to build model teachers and model classrooms that offer all teachers in the school the opportunity to witness exemplary teaching of reading at all elementary grade levels. While all aspects of reading instruction are addressed as needed, emphasis is placed on developing reading comprehension, student metacognition, and student ability to think deeply about text. The focus of the program is to develop teacher capacity and, as a result, raise student achievement.

Rationale for Customized Capacity Building Professional Development

- *Effective teachers and school leaders matter for student achievement. School leadership ranks second only to teacher quality among school-related factors that affect student learning.*
- *Localized capacity-building professional development is an effective use of human and financial resources that allows educators to learn new strategies and techniques in different ways, and supports risk taking and collegial relationships.*

The link between educator quality and student learning is well established. Teacher effectiveness is the school-related factor that most affects student learning, followed by school leadership. This means the ongoing professional development for educators translates to measurable benefits for students. However, it is important to note that not all professional development is alike. One-time workshops and keynote addresses that aren't grounded in improvement goals and don't focus on building local expertise won't move the needle on student achievement.

Capacity Building Professional Development

Effective capacity-building professional development begins with a plan aimed at addressing the specific learning needs of both teachers and students in a particular district or school. It also includes an evaluation process to ensure the attainment of stated goals and engages educators in ongoing collaborative learning.

The foundation of the EB approach rests on a teacher leader model that builds teacher capacity within a district or school with a focus on effective, school-based professional learning practices. The model begins with a school needs assessment and then narrows in on specific instructional and leadership approaches tailored to meet identified needs of individual teachers and for students. Capacity-building professional development is tailored to the precise needs of the individuals and the goals of the school and school district. Capacity-building is essential to sustainable school improvement because it develops local expertise in instructional and leadership practices through customized and differentiated professional learning.

EB professional development:

- *Builds local capacity through intensive, district wide and/or school wide professional learning in pedagogy and content, enabling teachers and teacher leaders to guide collaboration among instructional staff.*
- *Establishes research-based, long-term professional development practices for all teachers and administrators to address academic achievement.*
- *Includes evaluation to determine the effect on teacher practice and student learning*
- *Employs proven high-quality professional development that results in student success in literacy.*

Capacity-building professional development supports lasting effects which translate into long-term benefits for students. Professional Learning in the Learning Profession, a recent report by the National Staff Development Council and School Redesign Network, affirms the value of growth opportunities that are “sustained, focused on important content, and embedded in the work of collaborative professional learning teams” to improve student learning. The link between educator quality and student learning is undeniable, and is the primary goal of EB’s professional development initiatives.

How Educational Bridge Builds Teacher Capacity

Educational Bridge (EB) has researched and developed effective training methods to increase teacher

capacity to improve student academic and reading achievement. Student’s reading ability, as demonstrated on TAKS test scores and other measures of student academic achievement, have consistently improved in schools that have engaged the services of EB. Anecdotal results and scientific research has consistently documented increased student ability to comprehend text, increase metacognition, and develop a life-long joy and passion for reading.

1. EB’s approach is to work with administrators and teachers to identify and isolate both teacher and student areas of need that require intervention to improve overall student reading ability and increase TAKS scores. Through a comprehensive audit that includes administrator and teacher interviews, classroom observations of instruction, and the analysis of student data EB specialists identify both student areas of need and teacher training requirements.

2. Customized training programs are developed that center around EB researched based best practices that target the nexus between teacher capabilities and student needs. Every teacher is seen as an individual with unique experiences. EB supports the teachers as individuals and builds on strengths to enable the staff development to succeed.

Unlike common staff development approaches that emphasize a program, or set of practices to improving student reading performance, the EB approach is to consider how best to increase the teacher's ability to meet the individual and diverse needs of students. Training is then tailored to increase teacher capability with focus on the instructional needs of students.

EB believes that adults learn in much the same way as children do. Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility model (1983) demonstrated this for children, but it has been adapted by EB for adult learners.

Through the gradual release of responsibility model, in contrast to more traditional forms of teacher inservice, learner centered professional development is expressly tailored for each teacher to move the teachers through a gradual release continuum beginning with an assessment of teacher needs. Necessary learning experiences are identified and are modeled and demonstrated for teachers before they are asked to implement the practices.

Throughout the process, the teachers observe exemplary instruction modeled by an EB specialist, receive personal coaching, view videos featuring model teachers, and engage in study groups reading of professional materials. Teachers regularly discuss and observe effective instruction with an EB reading specialists prior to implementing the practices. Next, the teachers implement the practices that were previously modeled and explored. In this phase, an EB coach will teach alongside the teachers to offer feedback. Teachers may also participate in peer observations at this stage, meet in teams to discuss implementation or new teaching strategies, examine student work, or determine next steps in instruction. When independence is reached, the teacher successfully integrates the new approach into his or her teaching. EB coaches conduct classroom observations and support teacher growth during all stages of the professional development.

EB's role is conceptualized much as a teacher's role when teaching children to read. EB's role is to model and scaffold the learning for teachers withdrawing support as the learner is able to proceed on her own. EB has conducted several major research studies focused on these methods that have demonstrated that they work and work effectively to accelerate the process.

Steps to Successful Implementation

Step One: Building a Common Vision

The training experiences have been developed and refined by EB to provide teachers with appropriate information and a firm foundation in the use of the gradual release of responsibility instructional model. Teachers are trained to use the teacher resource guides published by EB to support instruction. In addition, in-depth training is offered for each step of the model. A key goal for the initial training is to develop a collaborative culture and a common language to be shared by all teachers.

The primary steps in the process begin with the development of a common vision and discourse around reading and learning. EB professionals help teachers define effective instruction and witness how it looks in the classroom during this stage of the process. The professional development begins with observations of an EB professional performing a demonstration lesson. Along with observation, the common vision building includes collaborative planning sessions, study groups, and book clubs.

Step Two: Implementation

Once a shared instructional vision is intact, the school is ready to move toward implementing it. Implementation includes more in-class coaching, observations in other classrooms or schools, and continued study of research. During this phase of the implementation the focus is geared toward the learner and trust is built between EB coaches and the teachers.

Step Three: Sustainment

Building a learning community is the focus of the third phase to enhance sustainability in the project. The emphasis in this phase is that EB coaches and teachers together learn about teaching and learning to enable collaborative decisions that support the efforts of the teachers that stick. To accomplish step three emphasis is on the following:

- Building a collaborative environment where teachers feel safe and supported. Experiences and new ideas are shared and everyone is included as part of the team.
- All teachers are provided with leadership opportunities.
- Purposeful choice is offered for professional development experiences. Arrays of learning opportunities within the context of a common vision are prepared by EB. Study groups are formed.
- Debriefing and feedback sessions are frequent and meaningful.
- Developing a functional and effective professional library for teachers to draw upon.
- Development of a clear set of goals and anticipated outcomes

EB believes that no two learning communities are alike and are built upon an interdependent group of individuals with a set of common goals and a shared vision. Accordingly, EB has developed a set of practical steps to emphasize during the professional development.

Teacher Observations

- Observation Norms- are established in the beginning of a project to accelerate the teachers becoming a community. All teacher observations will be preceded by EB led discussions to deconstruct the observation norms before teachers witness a demonstration lesson.
- Debriefing- follows each observation session with emphasis on teacher reflection as to how the demonstration lesson fits into their instruction.
- Observations- occur across days and are not limited to a single observation.
- Opportunity- for reflection and self-assessment.
- Follow-up- classroom observations by EB professionals to support implementation of new learning following a teacher observation.
- Observation notebooks- prepared by EB for all teachers.

In-Class Support Includes:

- Planning Instruction
- Observation with Feedback
- Demonstration Lessons
- Coteaching
- Reflection and debriefing sessions
- Team Planning Meetings

Topics Commonly Included Educational Bridge Professional Development

Getting Ready to Teach Reading: Preparing the Teacher to:

Build a Place for Reading: The physical structure of a powerful reading environment

Create a Literate Community in the classroom by creating an organizing vision

Develop ongoing structures for:

- Setting goals and purposes for reading
 - Read-Alouds
 - Minilessons
 - Conferring and coaching
 - Moving from conferring to coaching
 - Guided Reading and strategy lessons
 - Classroom lending library
 - Assessment
 - Centers, book clubs, literature circles
 - Classroom routines
 - Matching Students to Texts
 - Assessment to inform instruction
 - Whole class instruction
 - Small group instruction
 - Independent Reading(and partnership reading)
- Classroom Management:**
- Adopting a proactive approach**
- Teaching the classroom routines and procedures
 - Maintaining student engagement and interest
 - Developing student's literacy habits
 - Handling the challenging student(s)

Building an Instructional Framework to Teach Comprehension

- Teaching Comprehension Explicitly

- The Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Model
- The Research Validate Comprehension Strategies
- Teaching the TEKS
- Teaching Multiple Strategies
- Effective informal methods for student assessment to inform instruction

Explicit Instructional Techniques for:

- Procedural Lessons / First 20 Days of school
- Teaching Narrative Text
- Teaching Expository Text
- Meeting the Needs of the Struggling Reader
- Addressing RTI
- Teaching Word Work
- Teaching Robust Vocabulary
- Improveing student Fluency
- Preparing Students for TAKS
- Preparing the model classroom for visitors
- Conducting demonstration lessons for other teachers
- Conducting parent conferences and home-linkage