



RESEARCH BRIEF

Teacher Institute Evaluation, 2009-10 to 2012-13

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LAUP started a Teacher Institute during the 2009-10 program year as part of its commitment to the professional growth and development of preschool teachers. The goal of the Teacher Institute was to strengthen the capacity of LAUP lead teachers with respect to the behaviors and competencies assessed in the Instructional Support dimension of CLASS. The Research and Evaluation Unit conducted an analysis of the Teacher Institute from 2009-10 to 2012-13. In general, the following findings emerged:

- Overall, teacher feedback about the Teacher Institute was favorable, although suggestions were made for more hands-on opportunities
- The amount of support received from coaches to implement instructional practices covered in the Teacher Institute varied across the years
- For three consecutive years, the Teacher Institute appears to have increased participating teachers' self-reported use of instructional support practices
- Limited time to plan and prepare was the biggest challenge for teachers trying to implement the instructional practices covered during the Teacher Institute

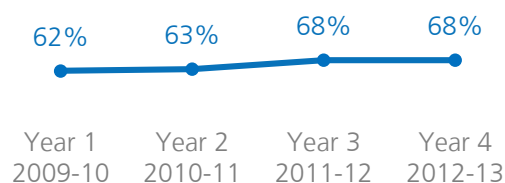
Overview

Effective interactions between teachers and students are essential for long-term school success. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) defines and measures teacher/student interactions across three domains: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. Research from several thousand PK-5 classrooms nationwide shows that students are generally in classrooms with moderate to high scores for emotional support and classroom organization (Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, 2011); however, most of these same classrooms are characterized by very low levels of instructional support. LAUP preschool classrooms are not the exception. In an effort to ensure a quality preschool experience for the children we serve, the LAUP Program Support Unit, comprised of a director and team of instructional support specialists, offered a multi-day professional development session with the goal of strengthening teachers' instructional support behaviors and competencies. For four consecutive years the three-day Teacher Institute (TI) offered the topic "Preschool Literacy" to our staff, facilitated by an independent contractor and her associate. TI trainings were held once a month for three consecutive months at four locations across LA County.

Cumulatively across four years the TI provided approximately 240 hours of professional development to 664 participants—mostly lead teachers and assistant teachers, but also a few preschool site supervisors and directors. For four years the TI focused on preschool literacy. LAUP will continue this effort to strengthen teachers' instructional support but will shift its focus to "Preschool Mathematics" for the program year 2013-14. The purpose of this brief is to take a historical look at the first four years of the TI (2009-10 to 2012-13) to inform efforts moving forward.

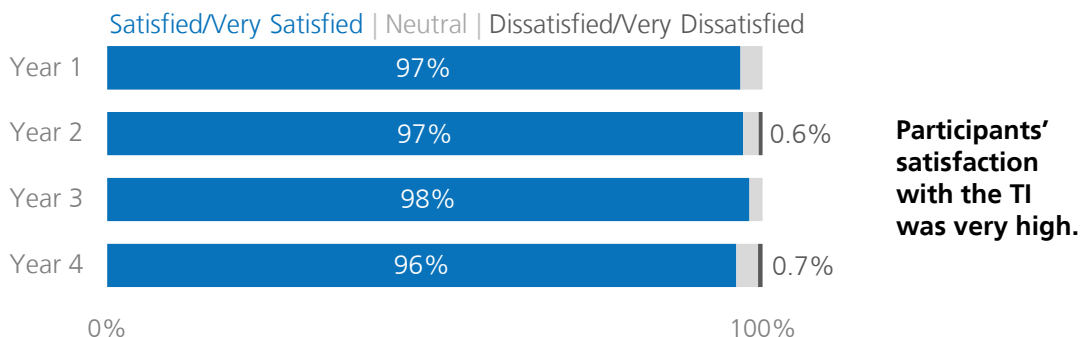
Promotion of the TI, with the assistance of LAUP coaches, led to the annual pre-registration of between 234 and 260 individuals from across the LAUP network. Of these, the number of completers (defined as the number of individuals who attended all three days of the Institute) led to a four-year average completion rate of 65%.

The number of individuals attending all three days of the institute has risen from Year 1.



Overall, teacher feedback about the Teacher Institute was favorable.

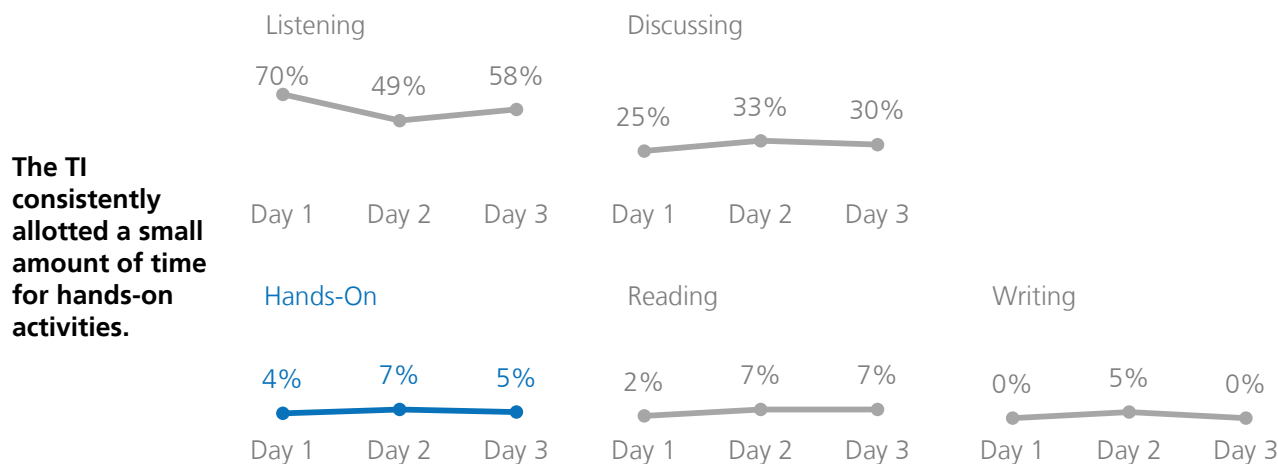
Every year, at the end of the three-day TI, participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a 5-point scale ranging from “Very Satisfied” to “Very Dissatisfied”. Participants’ satisfaction with the TI was at least 96 percentage points or higher.



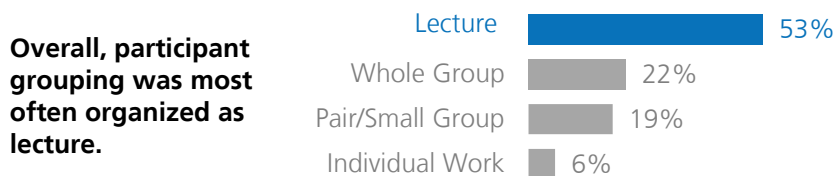
Participants wanted more hands-on opportunities.

In an effort to improve the TI from year to year, participants were also asked the open-ended question, “What changes to the TI would you suggest for the future?” Responses were analyzed for years three and four, only. For both years, the changes most commonly suggested were more hands-on group work, and share-out opportunities during the delivery of the Teacher Institute. This prompted a closer look at our field notes for how the time was split during a three-day series. We looked at participation mode and participant grouping. Participant mode is defined as how the facilitator intended for the participants to receive the content (e.g. discussing, hands-on, listening, reading, or writing).

Analysis of participant mode shows that in total participants at the TI spent 60% of the time listening, close to 30% of the time discussing, 6% of the time reading or writing, and only 5% of the time on hands-on activities. The time allotted for each participation mode was generally consistent each day of the teacher institute with the exception of decreasing time spent listening and increasing time spent discussing.

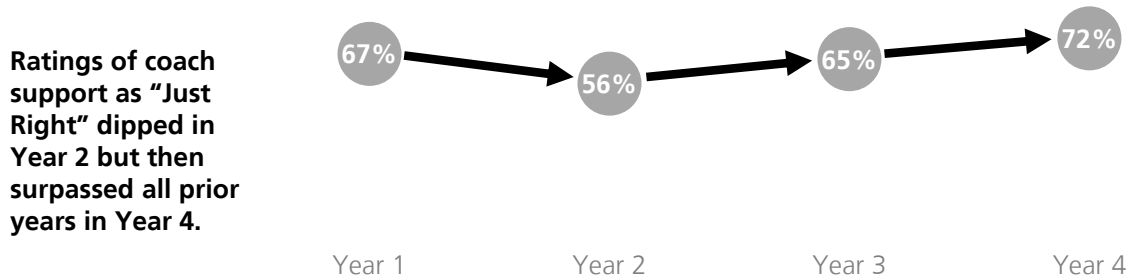


We also analyzed field notes for how much time was spent according to each type of participant grouping. Participant grouping is defined as how facilitators organized the participants during the day (e.g. individual, lecture, small group, or whole group). Analysis of participant grouping shows that participants spent most of their time being lectured, followed by whole group work, pairs or small group work, and individual work.

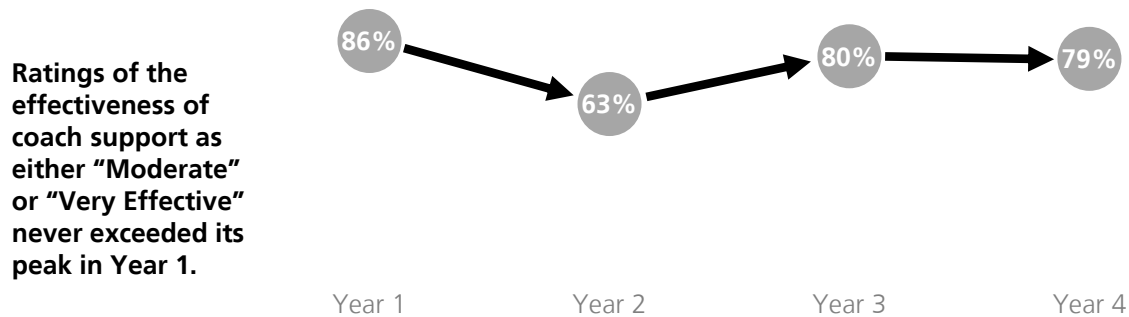


Participants' rating of support from coaches to implement instructional practices covered in the Teacher Institute has varied across the years.

Post-TI surveys asked participants to rate the amount and the effectiveness of their coach's support in implementing the instructional practices addressed in the TI. Participants rated coach support on a 4-point scale from "Did Not Get Support" to "More Than I Would Like". The figure below shows participants' ratings of the amount of their coach's support as "Just Right".



Participants rated the effectiveness of their coach's support on a 5-point scale from "Not Effective" to "Very Effective". The figure below shows participants' rating of the effectiveness of their coach's support as "Moderate" or "Very Effective".



Decisions of how to structure the Teacher Institute may potentially explain the variability in ratings of coaching support since Year 1.

- The **voluntary nature of participation** in the TI created a motivated Year 1 cohort. However, the level of motivation observably diminishing with subsequent cohorts.
- Coaches were given a preview of the TI content and assigned the role of small group facilitators for Year 1 and Year 3 only. In Year 2 and Year 4 **preview of the TI with coaches was skipped**, even though they were still expected to support LAUP providers with implementing TI content in their classrooms.
- Providers and coaches were **not expected to develop goals around implementing TI strategies** in the classroom until Year 2.

For four consecutive years, the Teacher Institute appears to have increased participating teachers' self-reported use of instructional support practices.

The TI taught specific instructional practices that aimed to strengthen participants' instructional support behaviors and competencies. Participants were asked to report the frequency with which they used these instructional practices both before and after the TI. Pre- and post- means were derived from 5-point Likert scale answers that ranged from 1 – "Never/Rarely" to 5 – "In Each Activity/Multiple Times a Day". Changes in pre-to-post answers are captured in the following table.

Pre-to-Post Changes in Frequency of Use

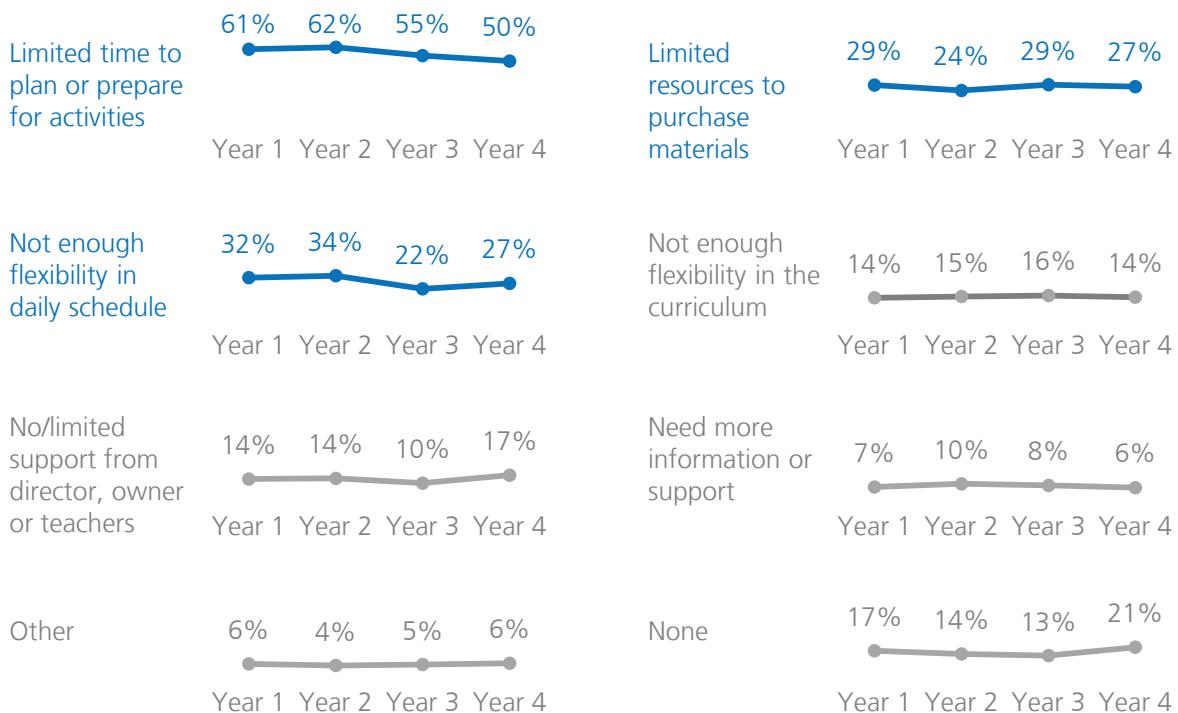
Instructional Practice	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Shared Reading	0.64	0.59	-0.70	0.80
Interactive Writing	0.68	0.75	0.03	0.24
Read Aloud	0.32	0.36	0.01	0.0
Pre-Select Books To Tie Into A Larger Concept	0.45	0.23	0.03	0.09
Pre-Plan Activities/Experiences Throughout Your Classroom	0.64	0.51	0.06	0.10
Pre-Select Vocabulary Words To Tie Into A Larger Concept	0.91	0.43	0.26	0.31
Ask Open-Ended Questions (e.g. How and Why) That Encourage Children To Analyze And Reason	0.40	0.39	0.04	0.12

Findings show a growth in the average frequency of most instructional practices except “Shared Reading” during Year 3 (a pre-to-post average decrease of 0.7 on a scale of 1-5) and “Read Aloud” during Year 4 (no change from pre-to-post). Over four years, “Interactive Writing” and “Pre-Selecting Vocabulary Words to tie into a Larger Concept” were the instructional practices with the largest average growth, pre-to-post TI.

At first glance, it appears that the average frequencies of instructional practices had bigger pre-to-post growth for Years 1 and 2 than for Years 3 and 4. This may be explained by a difference in the survey design than by actual change in practice. For Years 1 and 2, a retrospective pre-post survey was administered after the TI; for Years 3 and 4, a pre survey was administered before the TI and a post survey was administered after the TI. Hence, Year 3 and 4 figures may be a more accurate reflection of changes in instructional practices pre-to-post TI.

‘Limited Time To Plan And Prepare’ was the biggest challenge for teachers trying to implement instructional practices covered in the Teacher Institute.

Participants were asked to identify which challenges they encountered while trying to implement instructional practices covered in the TI from a list of common challenges.



For four consecutive years, “Limited Time to Plan and Prepare” was the most frequently reported challenge by TI participants. “Limited Time to Plan And Prepare” was identified as a challenge by more than 60% of participants for Years 1 and 2. The next most frequently reported challenge was “Limited Resources to Purchase Materials” and “Not Enough Flexibility in the Daily Schedule”.

Recommendations

Positive feedback about the training series and the increases in self-reported practices indicate that participants felt that the TI was an effective means of providing professional development. Because research shows that professional development sessions are not effective in isolation, (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002), LAUP offered two types of follow-up opportunities for participants after the TI: 1) TI participants were given the chance to join one of several learning communities across the county, and 2) LAUP set expectations for coaches to web the TI content into their work with providers by selecting a goal and tracking its progress. The opportunity to be part of a learning community after participating in the TI helped participants to discuss, ask, share, and learn from other participants on how they have implemented or will implement the instructional practices covered during the TI. TI participants reported variability in coach support across the past four years and identified Limited Time To Plan And Prepare For Activities as their biggest challenge in implementing the instructional practices covered in the TI.

The following recommendations stem from four years of survey findings:

- Future teacher professional development efforts should increase the 5% of time that participants spend on hands-on activities and aim for a more even distribution of the percent of time that participants spend on various learning modes and grouping.
- Coaches should be trained early and often on the professional development content that teachers will receive. In addition, expectations about the coach’s role in the professional development should be clearly articulated to them early and often (annually, at a minimum).
- Coaches could offer time-saving tips to providers about implementing practices learned during professional development —reinforcing the professional development content as a complement to the instructional activities that teachers already implement in their classrooms, rather than an add-on or further tax on their limited time.

LAUP’s teacher professional development model is based on sound principles of adult learning, has shown indications of effectiveness in key areas of teachers’ practices, and holds promise to improve instruction in even greater ways.

References

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Appendix

Methodology

The following questions guided this historical evaluation of the first four years of the TI: 1. What are teachers' perceptions of the TI? 2. Are coaches effectively supporting teachers/participants? 3. How does teacher practice change by participating in the TI? 4. How do participating teachers share what they learn with other teachers?

A mixed methods approach was used to conduct this evaluation: pre- and post-TI participant surveys informed our quantitative analysis; whole-day observations of the TI trainings informed our qualitative analysis. For years one and two, a retrospective pre-, post-TI survey was used. For years three and four, a two-time, pre-, post-TI survey was used.

Detailed Tables

Teacher Institute Participation

	Year 1 2009-10	Year 2 2010-11	Year 3 2011-12	Year 4 2012-13	4-Year TOTAL
# Registered	237	259	260	234	990
# Attended 3 Days	146	163	177	158	644
% of Registered Who Completed 3 Days	62%	63%	68%	68%	65%

Participant Grouping

TI Day	Individual	Lecture	Pair/Small Group	Whole Group
Day 1	4%	70%	14%	13%
Day 2	7%	35%	28%	30%
Day 3	9%	49%	16%	26%
TOTALS:	6%	53%	19%	22%

For more information about this evaluation please contact researchmail@laup.net.