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## Model Classrooms: One Approach to Teacher Shortages

Ashlee Boothe

Hardin ISD, ashleeboothe@gmail.com

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## **Model Classrooms: One Approach to Teacher Shortages**

Dr. Ashlee Boothe

### **Abstract**

Due to a nationwide teacher shortage, instructional leaders are utilizing more alternatively certified teachers than in the past, creating a problem for principals (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Birinci and Amburgey, 2022). Teachers in alternatively certified programs often lack pedagogy due to an absence of educational training, and as a result, principals hire teachers who are inadequately trained for the classroom. Therefore, there is a need to improve the way instructional leaders prepare alternatively certified teachers. The solution to this dilemma is creating professional learning through model classrooms, a term coined by the author. Model classrooms serve as exemplars to other teachers with structure, processes, and standards through experiential learning (Radovic et al., 2021; Weisling and Gardiner, 2018). Authentic, hands-on learning allows teachers to conceptualize theories and directly apply strategies within the classroom. Model classrooms provide instructional leaders with the ability to provide experiential learning that is meaningful and impactful to teachers.

*Keywords:* exemplars, modeling, best practices, professional learning

There is a great need to redefine the mentorship program for teachers throughout the United States to recruit and retain quality teachers during a movement known as “the great resignation.” Nationwide there is a shortage of teachers, especially in the areas of special education, math, science, and bilingual education (Podolsky et al., 2017; Malkus et al, 2015; Devier, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education estimated the teacher shortage could be up to 200,000 unfilled teaching positions by 2025. The teacher shortage has grown significantly since COVID-19, creating an issue for principals looking for qualified staff (Birinci and Amburgey, 2022). The lack of qualified teaching staff presents a problem nationwide, however, the problem is intensified in rural areas, which Rosenblatt et al., (2019) said accounts for nearly one-third of all U.S. public schools. Several factors contribute to teacher shortages such as certification requirements, location, pay, working conditions, class sizes, and safety concerns (Malkus et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006;

Behrstock-Sherratt, 2016). The lack of available qualified teachers creates a problem for principals during the hiring season.

Without a large teacher applicant pool, principals seek applicants enrolled in alternative certification programs, which creates another problem for leaders. Alternatively, certified teachers do not receive the same pedagogical training that traditional education teachers receive, and therefore, teacher candidates are entering the classroom with a lack of necessary training (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Each alternative certification program yields varying results, however, there is much debate and discussion over the level of preparedness of alternative certification teachers. Despite the lack of training, principals must hire candidates who may not be adequately prepared for the classroom. This scenario means that teachers are beginning a teaching career while engaging in teacher education training while lacking a strong foundation in pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The solution to this growing problem in education is utilizing model classrooms through experiential learning due to the learner's ability to combine experiences with knowledge and comprehension (Kolb, 1984).

### **Model Classroom Defined**

Model classrooms is a term coined by the author and is defined as a classroom that sets the standard for excellence regarding structure, procedures, and standards while serving as an example for other teachers to follow. Model classrooms serve as exemplar classrooms for educators, allowing teachers to apply theories of systems to instructional practice (Radovic et al., 2021; Weisling and Gardiner, 2018). In a study conducted by Moreno and Ortegado-Layne (2007), researchers found that teachers who engaged in experiential learning practices were more likely to apply theoretical principles learned, had more positive attitudes toward learning, and had higher levels of engagement.

It is essential for instructional leaders to create learning opportunities that prepare teachers to meet the instructional needs of all learners through engaging and directly applicable professional learning experiences (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020). Model classrooms allow for the learning professional to engage in hands-on learning and experiential reflection in teaching practices (Lamb, 2015). The use of exemplars as an instructional resource empowers teachers to engage in hands-on learning experiences that can be immediately applied to the classroom (Ho, 2015; Moreno and Ortegado-Layne, 2007; Moreno and Valdez, 2007). Additionally, professional learning takes place in a setting that is familiar to the

teacher and led by a peer. This type of learning environment allows the learner to feel comfortable and more at ease during professional learning. Placing the learner in the natural setting provides more relevance and meaning to experiential learning (Yardley et al., 2012).

### **Model Classroom Design**

In addition to placing the learner in an environment conducive to relevant learning, model classrooms follow Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning which consists of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and implementation. During the experience phase, a teacher will observe the model classroom teacher. The observation phase is the initial point of contact and is essential to experiential learning. Second, the teacher engages in reflective practice with the model classroom teacher, either one-on-one or in a group experience (Lamb, 2015). Open discussion is vital during the reflection phase because it allows for two-way communication of best practices during observation (Fain and Zachary, 2020; Bailey and Jakicic, 2019). Next, the teacher must conceptualize personal learning into theory. This step requires the learner to create a strategic plan to implement. The last step in the model classroom is to implement the plan of action. The Kolb (1984) model of experiential learning provides the learner with real-world experiences that lead to direct implementation processes in a student-centered environment. After the teacher has implemented instructional practices from the model classroom, the teacher must participate in a self-evaluation to ensure the strategies were effective. The evaluative piece is crucial in determining success for the learner through reflective practice (Lamb, 2015).

Systematic procedures provide educators an opportunity to combine theory and practice (Radovic et al., 2021; Weisling and Gardiner, 2018). Authentic learning is essential for active engagement and is accomplished through the intentional design of the model classroom program by instructional leaders (Lamb, 2015). Professional learning occurs for both the model classroom teacher and the new teacher. The model classroom teacher attends professional development that is aligned with the district's goals, vision, and mission to support best practices within instruction (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019). Secondly, the model classroom teacher personifies the characteristics of a model classroom teacher. Exemplar teachers who are willing to participate in professional learning and meet the criteria of a model classroom teacher are then selected by the instructional leader to serve as a model classroom. Throughout the school year,

the model classroom teacher engages in face-to-face and virtual discussions about best practices for instruction. New teachers are invited throughout the year to observe, reflect, contemplate, and implement new instructional strategies learned in the model classroom, engaging in experiential learning and thus transforming theory into practice (Lamb, 2015; Ho, 2015; Moreno and Ortegado-Layne, 2007; Moreno and Valdez, 2007). The practice of model classrooms allows new teachers to gain knowledge and experience in a collaborative environment, and then directly apply strategies learned (Fain and Zachary, 2020; Bailey and Jakicic, 2019).

### **Characteristics of a Model Classroom Teacher**

The model classroom teacher embodies a growth mindset and has the following characteristics:

- Strong rapport and relationship building with students, parents, staff, and community members (Weisling and Gardiner, 2018)
- Promotes best practices in instruction (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)
- Contributes constructively to professional learning communities (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)
- Engages in collaborative discussions with colleagues (Fain and Zachary, 2020; Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)
- Promotes professional standards of teaching and learning (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)
- Engages students in activities that promote critical thinking (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)
- High expectations for learning for all students (Bailey and Jakicic, 2019)

The model classroom teacher is willing to engage the learner in authentic learning, rather than just be a sage on the stage. The model classroom teacher is an active participant in the learning process and engages in professional learning as well to promote best practices in education.

### **Conclusion**

Although there is a nationwide shortage of teachers, instructional leaders can create meaningful learning for new teachers to retain and recruit quality educators through model classrooms (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006; Birinci and Amburgey, 2022). Meaningful and impactful professional learning is derived

from model classrooms. Model classrooms allow new teachers to combine the knowledge learned through alternative certification and mentor programs with field-based experiences that directly tie theory to instructional practice (Lamb, 2015; Ho, 2015; Moreno and Ortegado-Layne, 2007; Moreno and Valdez, 2007). Experiential learning through model classrooms serve as an exemplar of structure, processes, and standards and provide a solution to inexperienced teachers due to teacher shortages.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Ashlee Boothe is the Director of Curriculum and School Improvement at Hardin ISD and the founder of AB Consulting. Her research interests focus on curriculum and instruction, fast-growth schools, and rural education. She earned an Ed.D. in Learning and Organizational Change at Baylor University.

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