

MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM WITH THE TRAINING CYCLE

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Effective tutor training programs employ several common features which form an ongoing cycle of experiences needed by novice tutors to develop essential skills. In this training cycle, trainees are told of or shown recommended tutoring techniques, given an opportunity to practice the techniques in an actual tutoring session, and encouraged to compare their tutoring performance to the modeled techniques and plan changes for subsequent sessions. The cycle is based on Bruce Joyce's five components of training (Joyce, Hersh, & McKibbin, 1983):

- Presentation of theory
- Modeling or demonstration
- Practice under simulated conditions
- Structured feedback
- Coaching for application.

Joyce's components can be condensed into a training cycle (see Figure 1) consisting of three basic steps:

1. Modeling. Describing the use of a technique by demonstrating it, explaining the circumstances for its use, and justifying its use through educational theory or other means.
2. Providing opportunities for practice.

3. Reflection and planning. Giving trainees ample opportunities to reflect upon their tutoring experiences, compare their performance to the model, and plan modifications to their future tutoring behavior.

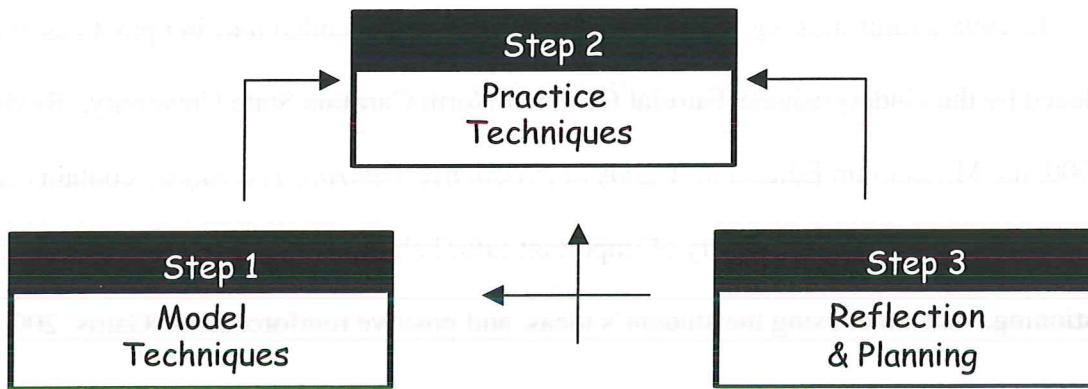


Figure 1. The training cycle.

Modeling

Some version of modeling is included in all training programs. Trainees are told what to do and usually why. A thorough explanation of the reasons for using a particular technique often motivates trainees to include it in their repertoire of skills. The “why” is particularly important for trainees with the Intuitive personality type (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), and these Intuitive-types may represent up to half of the trainees.

Visual examples can be used to complement the descriptions of recommended tutoring techniques. Video has been used to model techniques in every kind of human endeavor, from sports like golf and tennis to sales and personnel applications in the business world to classroom demonstrations in college physics and chemistry. Not surprisingly, video is also helpful in providing new tutors with visual examples to emulate. Overt modeling of expected behaviors is one of the most powerful ways to achieve behavioral changes (DeTure, 1979; Kpanja, 2001). The use of video to model desired teaching behaviors goes back over

thirty years (Borg et al., 1970) and is now coming into frequent use for training tutors. The use of a training video is one means of modeling recommended by College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) in its tutoring program certification requirements.

In 1998 a tutor training video series, based on recommended tutoring practices, was produced by the Undergraduate Tutorial Center at North Carolina State University. Revised in 2000, the Millennium Edition of *A Look at Productive Tutoring Techniques* contains eight modules and demonstrates a variety of important tutor behaviors, including listening skills, questioning, wait time, using the student's ideas, and positive reinforcement (Gattis, 2000).

Practice

Modeled behaviors should be practiced shortly after they are presented. Simulated tutoring sessions in training are possible, but it can be difficult to set up situations where one trainee has the sufficient background to tutor another trainee. Lacking a real tutor-tutee match, role-playing can be used; however, the lack of reality can cause problems for the players and the observers.

The best practice is actual tutoring. If tutors receive their training just prior to their tutoring sessions, they will be able to put the new techniques into practice while the techniques are still fresh in the mind. The ideal tutor training program consists of a number of training sessions spread over time, so that tutors can continually add new techniques to their repertoire of skills.

Reflection and Planning

Because only the trainee can make the behavioral changes necessary to more closely approximate the model, the last step of reflection and planning is essential to integration of the new skills into tutor behavior. In the reflection and planning stage, trainees must take

some time to assess their recent tutoring sessions and consider whether the modeled techniques have been incorporated. Trainees also need to commit to make changes in future tutoring sessions. If either the reflection or the commitment to change is missing, no improvements in tutoring will be achieved. This is a critical step in the learning cycle, but unfortunately, it is one that is often missing from a training program.

Tutor trainers are responsible for structuring reflection and planning opportunities for the trainees. Otherwise, the necessary reflection and planning may not happen on its own. Activities requiring focused contemplation, such as journal assignments, help to insure an adequate amount of reflection time. Focus and structure can be added to journal assignments by asking trainees to comment on a particular aspect of a recent tutoring session; for example, they could be asked to describe the process of using open-ended questions and the tutees' responses to those questions.

The act of reflection can also be enhanced through the use of training videos. When a video is shown, the tape should be paused frequently. The pauses by themselves extend the potential time for reflection, assuming that trainees are actively observing the modeled behaviors. During the pauses, tutor trainers should ask questions to check the trainees' understanding of previously presented concepts and to direct attention to upcoming concepts. The user's guide (Gattis, 2002) that accompanies *A Look at Productive Tutoring Techniques* has a number of suggested questions and activities to use in order to maintain attention, facilitate understanding of concepts, and encourage the trainees to include the modeled behaviors in their plans for future tutoring sessions.

The last two steps in Joyce's training model suggest other strategies that trainers can use to facilitate the reflection and planning that the trainee needs (Joyce et al., 1983). Joyce

calls for structured feedback on trainee performance and supportive coaching. Tutor trainers may provide both the feedback and the coaching with a post-conference meeting after an observed tutoring session. However, trainer/supervisors may be uncomfortable directly observing a tutoring session, which is, after all, a conversation between two people. If training is offered as a course or workshop, trainers can provide necessary feedback through class discussions and responses to journals in which trainees describe their tutoring experiences.

Trainers can also evaluate the trainees' videotaped tutoring sessions. These evaluations are both quantitative and subjective. For example, if tutors have a goal to limit their talking to no more than 50% of the session and to use "indirect" tutoring techniques at least 50% of the time, trainers can calculate whether or not those goals are met. (Flanders Interaction Analysis (Flanders, 1970) is a method that can be used to determine these percentages accurately.) The analysis enables the trainer to provide feedback on the type and duration of tutor and tutee talk, allowing the novice tutors to then compare their session characteristics to the goals. The percentages help the trainees determine if they are sufficiently using the emphasized techniques. Trainers can also give the trainees written feedback on their performance. An effective approach is to combine a little constructive criticism with healthy doses of positive reinforcement.

Summary

Tutors want to be good at their jobs, just like everyone else. In order to become good, however, they must obtain a good understanding of expected behavior, learn ways to gauge their own performance, and receive support while they attempt to narrow the gap between the two. With sufficient information about their tutoring performances and time to reflect, most

trainees will actively plan behavioral changes to bring their performance more in line with modeled behaviors and stated expectations. The task of the tutor trainer is to provide the information and to structure the opportunities that trainees need to improve their performance. The training cycle provides an outline of the important elements needed in a training program that empowers the novice tutor to excel.

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