

COTSEN
FAMILY
FOUNDATION

the ART of TEACHING Program

Executive Summary

FINDINGS FROM:

Fellow, Mentor, Principal, and Superintendent Interviews
Student Focus Groups
Student Assessment Data Pilot Study

OCTOBER 2006



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COTSEN FAMILY FOUNDATION
the ART of TEACHING program

Vital Research, LLC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cotsen Family Foundation's *the ART of TEACHING* program has as its mission to help accomplished and veteran teachers to become great professionals, primarily through intensive mentoring by a gifted teacher over two years. Now in its fifth year, the program has expanded to six districts, 18 schools, 19 mentors, and 90 fellows. Three evaluations (2001-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005) have been conducted by the Foundation to examine program implementation, especially in its pilot phase, and program impact. With the large number of schools and fellows this year, the Cotsen Family Foundation contracted with Vital Research to collect data from program stakeholders to continue the program evaluation efforts:

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at each school site with participating principals, mentors, and Cotsen fellows and by phone with four district administrators.
- Three student focus groups were conducted with fifth-grade students of second-year Cotsen fellows to elicit student perceptions of changes in teaching activities and themselves during the year.
- A pilot study was designed to analyze student assessment data to examine the impact of the program on student learning in the Cotsen fellows' classes. Two schools districts have agreed to provide the necessary data for a longitudinal comparison study, which will be carried out when the state CST scores in English-language arts (ELA) and math are available.

Program Description

The ART of TEACHING program consists of a number of elements designed to provide customized experiences over two-years to help revitalize, stimulate, and expand the skill set of accomplished teachers to become great teachers. The program:

- Assists teachers in setting a personal professional growth target in relation to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (the *Standards*) and specific subject area focus (e.g., writing, reading);
- Uses a mentoring cycle of planning, observation, feedback and reflection for the further development of practice;
- Includes mentor participation in co-teaching;
- Encourages strategies that utilize assessment and other forms of evidence to plan instruction;

- Provides opportunities to observe superior teaching at other schools and attend professional development activities;
- Utilizes videotaping of fellows’ teaching in conjunction with mentor debriefing; and
- Stimulates professional dialogue within schools through monthly inquiry meetings facilitated by the mentor.

In addition, fellows are provided with a number of resources that supplement the program elements such as money for books or instructional materials of their choice and substitute time that can be used in a variety of ways.

Fellows were asked to rate how valuable each of the programmatic elements were to their professional growth, and mentors were asked how valuable each of the programmatic elements were to their work with the fellows. Overall, the elements were rated between very valuable and extremely valuable on a scale of 1 to 5, with extremely valuable being 5 (See Table 1E). “Observation and feedback sessions,” “observing teaching at other schools,” and “professional development sessions” were given the highest ratings by both fellows and mentors.

Table 1E. Fellow Ratings of the Value of Various Program Elements

Questions	Fellow Average	Mentor Average
Working with your mentor on:		
Setting professional goals and using standards-based growth targets	4.31	4.47
Lesson planning	4.35	4.42
Observation and feedback sessions	4.66	4.63
Co-teaching	4.49	4.44
Using assessments to plan instruction (e.g. diagnostic tests)	4.34	4.42
Backwards planning of lessons, starting with student outcomes	4.31	4.39
Observing teaching at other schools	4.58	4.58
Videotaping teaching and debriefing with your mentor	4.09	4.39
Monthly inquiry group meetings	4.22	4.37
Attending other professional development activities (e.g., conferences, institutes)	4.60	4.68

Relationship Between Mentors and Fellows

One of the key elements of *the ART of TEACHING* program is the quality of the relationship between the mentor and his/her fellows. As seen in Table 2E, between 85% to 91% of the fellows strongly agreed that their mentor is supportive and friendly and that there is mutual professional respect, communication, and trust.

Table 2E. Fellow Ratings of Mentor/Fellow Interactions

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average
My mentor is supportive.	1%	0%	3%	10%	85%	4.78
My mentor is friendly.	0%	1%	3%	5%	91%	4.85
I professionally respect my mentor.	0%	0%	2%	7%	91%	4.89
My mentor professionally respects me.	0%	1%	3%	7%	89%	4.83
I communicate well with my mentor.	0%	1%	2%	9%	88%	4.83
My mentor and I trust each other.	1%	0%	5%	3%	91%	4.83

Time Spent on Mentoring Activities

Fifty-four percent of fellows indicated that they spent three or more hours per week with their mentors; 46% of fellows indicated that they spent less than three hours per week with mentors.

Overall, fellows enjoyed the time they spent with their mentors. Many of them found the time spent on observations in the classroom and debriefings extremely valuable; they were able to get helpful feedback about their practice that they reflected on and used to improve. Others valued the time spent co-teaching with the mentor. Fellows learned a tremendous amount watching the mentor interact with and instruct students in their classes; they also found it particularly helpful to have another adult in the room who could serve as a resource.

About 30% of fellows, however, believed that their mentor was not able to spend enough time with them because they were either distracted by other things or had too many fellows to work with.

Program Impact on Fellows

Professional Growth Targets

As part of *the ART of TEACHING* program, fellows choose their own professional growth targets to work on for the duration of their two years as Cotsen fellows. Each fellow selects:

- 1) one of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (the *Standards*) to work towards; and
- 2) a subject area to improve upon (e.g., reading, math, etc.).

Table 3E provides an overview of the fellows' selection of standards.

Table 3E. California Standards for the Teaching Profession

Standard	Number*	Percent
Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for All Students	28	32%
Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning	27	31%
Assessing Student Learning	9	10%
Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning	8	9%
Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning	8	9%
Developing as a Professional Educator	8	9%
<i>Did not describe</i>	24	27%

*Note: Some fellows chose more than one standard

As shown in Table 4E, fellows chose a variety of subject areas to focus on this year. The most common area selected was Writing (47%). Reading was the second most popular subject area with 32% of fellows choosing to improve instruction in reading.

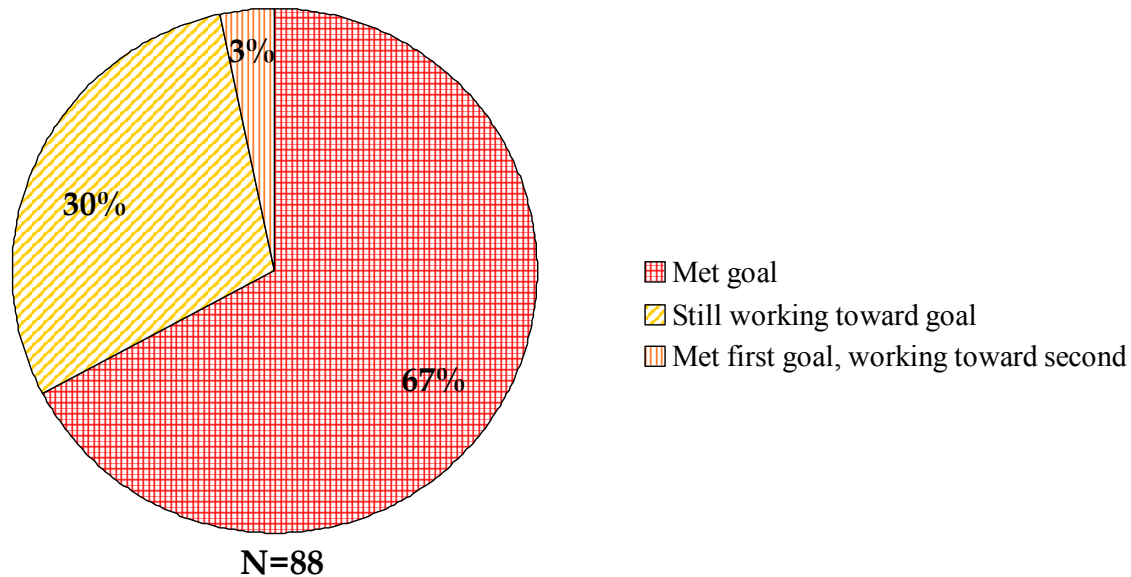
Table 4E. Subject Areas for Professional Growth Targets

Subject Area	Number	Percent
Writing	41	47%
Reading	28	32%
Math	13	15%
Science	5	6%
English Language Acquisition	4	5%
Social Studies	3	3%
Library Book Selection	1	1%
Project-Based Learning	1	1%
GATE Instruction	1	1%

*Note: Some fellows chose more than one subject area

As seen in Figure 1E, 67% of fellows believed that they met their professional growth targets.

Figure 1E. Meeting Professional Growth Targets



Impacts on Teaching

There were four main impacts on teaching cited by fellows:

1. **Implementation of New Instructional Strategies:** Fellows received exposure to strategies and techniques that they had not previously known about by reading relevant research literature, attending conferences and workshops, and observing other teachers.
2. **Increased Reflection on Practice:** Mentor observations and feedback sessions provided an opportunity for fellows to actively reflect on their practice, what was working, and what needed to improve. When mentors observed, they scripted the lessons of fellows and used those notes to provide detailed feedback that would promote reflection. Mentors also used questioning techniques to help fellows reflect on how lessons were working and what they could do to improve. Moreover, fellows served as “sounding boards” for fellows, enabling useful dialogue, deep thinking about instructional practice. Videotapes also promoted reflection; fellows explained that it was particularly powerful to see their own teaching.
3. **Transfer of Effective Practice:** Not only did fellows learn about and implement new strategies in the subject area they chose for their professional growth target, but they also applied the successful techniques they learned to other subject areas.
4. **Better Planning and Organization:** Teachers reported increased lesson planning and goal-setting as well as organizing curriculum materials and assessment data to facilitate their teaching.

Ratings on Fellows' Teaching

Fellows and mentors were asked to rate the fellows' quality as a teacher on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being a great teacher (the Cotsen ideal), 3 being a competent teacher, and 1 being the opposite of a great teacher. In addition, Cotsen Family Foundation (CFF) staff also rated fellows based on a videotaped segment of their teaching at the beginning and end of both years of the program.

Table 5E summarizes some of the key ratings for second-year and first-year fellows. No second year fellows were rated as excellent at baseline. By the end of two years, mentors rated 56% of the fellows at 5.5 or higher and CFF staff rated 18% of the fellows as excellent. Principals rated 78% of second year fellows in the top 20% of school faculty. However, none of the fellows rated themselves as excellent.

The percent of fellows that gained 0.5 or more or 1.0 or more in two years varied by raters; mentor ratings represented the greatest positive change overall, averaging 1.61 points over two years. For first year fellows, mentors and fellows rated almost all fellows higher at the end of the first year than at the beginning; in general, fellows' ratings increased by at least 0.5 or more. The mentors and CFF staff rated the first year fellows' gain at about half of the gain of the second year fellows.

Table 5E. Summary of Key Ratings for Second and First Year Fellows

<i>Second Year Fellows</i>	Rated by Fellows	Rated by Mentors	Rated by CFF Staff
Rated excellent (5.5 or higher) at the beginning of the program	0%	0%	0%
Rated excellent at the end of the second year of the program	0%	56%	18%
Gained 0.5 or more in 2 years	78%	94%	59%
Gained 1.0 or more in 2 year	67%	78%	35%
Average gain over 2 years	0.92	1.61	0.60
<i>First Year Fellows</i>	Rated by Fellows	Rated by Mentors	Rated by CFF Staff
Made some gain	97%	99%	74%
Gained 0.5 or more in one year	96%	93%	30%
Gained 1.0 or more in one year	84%	44%	16%
Average gain over one year	1.08	0.83	0.25

Program Impact on Mentors

Impact on Teaching

There were four main impacts on teaching cited by mentors:

1. **Exposure to New Instructional Strategies:** By observing their fellows, visiting other schools, reviewing research articles, and attending conferences and workshops, mentors were exposed to several new instructional strategies that they had not previously known about.
2. **Exposure to Teaching:** By observing fellows in their classrooms and through co-teaching, mentors were also exposed to teaching at different grade levels and effective practice in subject areas that they were less familiar with. Such experiences deepened their understanding of teaching and learning school-wide.
3. **Being More Evidence-Based:** Mentors discussed the value of making more evidence-based decisions about teaching. Their participation in the program helped them learn about how to gather evidence – student work, observations of teaching, research literature – to make real and lasting changes to instruction.
4. **Deepened Understanding of Student Learning:** Classroom observations enabled mentors to witness the impact of certain instructional strategies on student engagement and learning.

Impact on Mentoring

Participation in trainings at the New Teacher Center and mentor monthly meetings also helped mentors learn about effective coaching techniques. Mentors also strengthened their understanding of how to facilitate rather than direct their fellows’ professional development. Mentors also commented on the importance of differentiating coaching for teachers: one size does not fit all when working with children or with adults.

Impact on Future Plans

Mentors were asked about their future career plans and how their participation in *the ART of TEACHING* program influenced their aspirations (See Table 6E).

Table 6E. Future Plans of Mentors

Future Plan	Number*	Percent
Administration/Leadership (e.g., principal, district leadership)	10	53%
Go Back to the Classroom	9	47%
Stay Involved with Cotsen	6	32%
Involvement with Charter Schools (e.g., start a charter school)	3	16%
Back to School (e.g., masters or doctorate)	2	11%
Teach at the University	2	11%
Teach Overseas	1	5%
National Boards	1	5%
Retire	1	5%

*Note: Some mentors shared more than one future plan

Program Impact on Students

Fellows, mentors, and principals identified two main positive impacts on students in interviews about *the ART of TEACHING* program, including:

- 1) Increased Student Engagement (e.g., students were more actively involved, spent more time on task, and directed their own learning); and
- 2) Enhanced Student Learning (e.g., improvement on benchmark exams, teacher-created assessments, writing samples, portfolios).

Three student focus groups were conducted at the school site with fifth grade students randomly selected from classes of second year fellows. In the “letter to the teacher” activity, students were asked to write a short note to their teacher about the best thing that happened to them in class this year, i.e., the highlights. It is noteworthy that among the activities that students mentioned, Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop were specifically highlighted. In the final activity where students are asked how they have changed as a reader or writer, many of their comments were related to either being more engaged (34%) or having learned more (43%).

Student Assessments

A pilot study was designed to analyze student assessment data to examine the impact of the program on student learning in the Cotsen fellows’ classes. Two schools districts have agreed to provide the necessary data for a longitudinal comparison study, which will be carried out when the state CST scores in English-language arts (ELA) and math are available.

Program Impact on Schools

There were four main impacts on schools cited by stakeholders:

1. **Collaboration:** The most common impact of *the ART of TEACHING* program on schools cited by mentors, fellows, and principals was an increased spirit of collaboration. The sharing among Cotsen fellows had a “ripple effect” on other teachers at the school; new instructional strategies were shared at grade-level meetings, teachers met with one another to share resources, non-Cotsen fellows were invited to inquiry meetings, teachers observed one another, and professional communities began to emerge.
2. **Increased Interest in Professional Development:** The participation in conferences and workshops by Cotsen fellows stimulated interest in other teachers: non-Cotsen teachers decided to apply to become a Cotsen fellow so they, too, could work on improving their skills, and school leaders encouraged non-Cotsen teachers to attend external professional development sessions.

3. **Exposure to New Instructional Strategies:** The exposure to and implementation of new instructional strategies occurred not only for Cotsen fellows and mentors; non-Cotsen teachers were also exposed to strategies they were unfamiliar with and they implemented new techniques and curriculum as a result of collaborating with Cotsen fellows.
4. **Increased Reflection:** The reflection that the *ART of TEACHING* program encouraged in Cotsen fellows and mentors “spilled over” to other teachers in Cotsen schools. Principals, fellows, and mentors talked about how other teachers at the school had also increasingly become more reflective about their practice and what works in the classroom.

Success Factors

Fellows, mentors, and principals identified numerous factors that contributed to the success of *the ART of TEACHING* program in their schools:

- **A Trusting Mentor Relationship;**
- **Mentor Expertise;**
- **“Seeing” Instruction** (i.e., observing other teachers and seeing their own instruction on videotape);
- **Mentor as Participant** (i.e. mentor participating in workshops, conferences, and inquiry groups helped them be “on the same page”);
- **Constructive Feedback** (i.e., honest, immediate, and non-threatening suggestions from mentors on teaching practice);
- **Sharing and Collaboration** (with other teachers in their schools);
- **Resources** (i.e., money, substitute release time, books and supplies);
- **Commitment;**
- **Openness to Take Risks;**
- **Confidence** (i.e., self-confidence in teaching);
- **Being Valued as a Professional;**
- **Individualized, Clearly Defined Goals;**
- **Accountability** (i.e., mentors held fellows accountable);
- **Emphasis on Evidence** (i.e., data-based decisions, tracking progress); and
- **Coordination of Logistics** (e.g., mentors freed up fellows’ time by registering for conferences, searching for research articles, buying supplies, filling out reimbursement forms, etc.).

Challenges

Overall, stakeholders were extremely satisfied with *the ART of TEACHING* program. However, in interviews, stakeholders did identify a few challenges associated with implementing *the ART of TEACHING* program in their schools.

1. **Time:** Fellows consistently noted that it was difficult to find the time to participate while also balancing demands and priorities.
2. **Incompatible School/District Priorities and Characteristics:** At times, schools and districts had priorities that were in conflict with fellow goals and mentoring activities (e.g., curriculum, testing).
3. **“Starting Up:”** Fellows were sometimes overwhelmed early in the program or nervous about being observed by a colleague. Fellows and mentors who had previously worked together needed to establish a new type of relationship; other fellows and mentors needed to “get to know” each other and build a foundation for the relationship.
4. **Student Issues:** Some fellows noted that they had particularly challenging students or began teaching a new grade-level or type of student (e.g., English language learners, students with special needs).
5. **Selection Issues:** Stakeholders shared that there is potential for resentment to set in when some teachers at a school site apply to be Cotsen fellows and are not accepted.
6. **Personal Issues:** Some fellows encountered changes in their personal lives that prevented them from participating fully in *the ART of TEACHING* program (e.g., pregnancy, health issues, maternity/paternity leave, school).
7. **Mentor Time:** Some fellows noted that mentors had too little time to spend with them because they had too many other responsibilities, too many fellows, or were only part-time.
8. **Poor Fit:** A few mentors talked about working with fellows that were not the right “fit” for *the ART of TEACHING* program (e.g., lacking the commitment necessary to participate, being involved in the program for the “wrong” reasons, being uninterested in their goals or development, or lacking the expertise necessary to be an artful teacher).
9. **Unique Foci:** A few fellows talked about finding it difficult to collaborate with other fellows because they had a subject area or grade-level focus that was unique (e.g., science, library book selection).
10. **Principal Involvement:** A couple of principals felt that it was a challenge to not be more involved in with *the ART of TEACHING* program in their schools. They felt uninformed and unable to support the program as much as they wanted.

Suggestions for Improvement

Stakeholders offered several suggestions for improving *the ART of TEACHING* program:

1. Lengthen the duration of the program to three or four years.
2. Provide more networking opportunities for fellows, mentors, and principals.
3. Keep the fellow groups small.
4. Increase principal involvement.

5. Expand the program to more teachers in my school.
6. Expand the program to other schools.
7. Improve inquiry meetings (e.g., more focus, inquiry groups based on common interests, grade-levels).
8. Provide more professional development opportunities (e.g., opportunities to observe, conferences, workshops).
9. Disseminate information about *the ART of TEACHING* program more broadly.
10. Improve mentor training opportunities (e.g., more training, different training for more experienced mentors, more meaningful mentor meetings).

Conclusion

Interviews with stakeholders revealed that program activities - observations and feedback sessions, professional development activities, and observing teaching at other schools, in particular - stimulated reflection on teaching practice and facilitated the implementation of new instructional strategies by fellows.

According to stakeholders, the impact of program activities appears to reach beyond just the teaching practice of fellows and has affected:

- Students (e.g., increased student engagement, enhanced learning);
- Mentors (e.g., impacts on teaching and mentoring, future career goals); and
- Non-Cotsen teachers (e.g., exposure to new instruction, increased collaboration).

Instrumental to the success of the program is a non-threatening fellow-mentor relationship built on trust and mutual respect. The presence of such a relationship provides the necessary foundation for fellows and mentors to have rich dialogue about teaching, share instructional practices, observe each other, and reflect together. The absence of such a relationship results in an unsatisfying coaching relationship.

Overall, stakeholders were extremely satisfied with *the ART of TEACHING* program. In fact, many interviewees recommended extending the program school wide and expanding the program to other schools and districts. Moreover, stakeholders consistently noted that they wished the program lasted longer than two years because they deeply enjoyed the experience, believed that the program prompted intense change in teaching practice, and saw additional potential for growth.