



Educational Considerations

Volume 18
Number 2 *School Improvement - Diversity for
Effective Interactions in Enhancing Quality
Education*

Article 11

4-1-1991

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Thomas G. Wicks III
Kansas State University

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Recommended Citation

Wicks, Thomas G. III (1991) "An Interview with Sam Kerman: Co-founder of TESA (Teacher Expectations and Achievement)," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 18: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1549>

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An Interview with Sam Kerman: Co-founder of TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement)

Thomas G. Wicks III

Q: If you were to describe TESA in a sentence, what would it be?

A: TESA is a staff development program involving specific supportive and motivating techniques with all students in a nondiscriminatory manner, the intended result of which is the accelerated academic growth of those students perceived to be low achievers.

Q: How did you conceptualize or develop the TESA concept?

A: Reviewing the work of Jacobson and Rosenthal, the Pygmalion study, Dr. Martin and I were aware that interactions between teachers and students were to a significant degree determined by how teachers perceived their students. Also, the work of Tom Good and Jere Brophy in *Looking in Classrooms* identified specific interaction which tended to be more stimulating and motivational and in fact was being utilized more frequently with students perceived to be high achievers. With our awareness of the Pygmalion study and further information gained from such studies as *Looking in Classrooms*, we proceeded from there (for more specifics regarding the development of the program, see *"Why Did You Call on Me? I Didn't Have My Hand Up!"*: PDK, 1979).

Q: Has research continued to support the program?

A: Very much so! Over the years school districts that have implemented TESA frequently send us their evalua-

tions of program effectiveness. In all cases, if the program was implemented according to guidelines, the objectives were met and often exceeded the findings of the original program (see study conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, 1983; also Decatur Township, Indiana, 1988).

Q: Have there been any surprises associated with the program?

A: Yes. Almost immediately we realized that the term 'low achiever' was relative to the setting. The concept would be just as applicable in gifted classroom. Also we became aware that interactions between parent and child, between school administrators and staffs, and in the private sector executives and subordinates, were no different than those interactions between teachers and students.

Q: What have been the main thrusts of TESA that have continued to make it effective for more than two decades?

A: When presenting the program's concept and objectives, it is essential that the content be kept very basic and simple. Also, most important is that at no time should the program be perceived as an evaluation design. Rather this is a program which facilitates the opportunity for teachers to work together and grow professionally.

Q: Are there concerns that you have about maintaining the quality of the TESA program?

A: Most definitely! My major concerns would center around the following points:

1. The appropriate selection of the individuals who will be trained must be effective communicators, motivators, and have good rapport with the participants.

2. That the program be implemented in the prescribed manner (i.e., voluntary, duration, etc).

3. That at no time should the program be used for evaluation.

4. That the program design not be modified or changed to any significant degree in the implementation process.

Q: When did you discover that you had a program that was going to be nationally recognized?

A: Almost immediately. It was apparent to me that educators immediately identified the program as one which met very broad needs.

Q: Have you considered any new modifications for the TESA program as we know it today?

A: No, I can't think of any at this time.

Q: How did you discover the need for a program like TESA?

A: As a consultant with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, I and many colleagues had the responsibility of assisting school districts in identifying procedures, strategies, etc., which would result in being more effective in working with students to accelerate academic gain. TESA seemed to be an excellent vehicle.

Q: How many states and countries have you presented this program?

A: The program has been implemented in one or more school districts in all fifty states. Outside the U.S., the program has been implemented in Canada, Australia and Puerto Rico. Also in Department of Defense Dependent Schools in England, Germany, Spain, Panama, Japan and Iceland.

Q: How do you envision TESA fitting into the effective schools movement?

A: The effective schools movement is based on quality and equity of student performance. TESA focuses on interacting with low achieving students equitably in the classroom.

Sam Kerman is Director of Kerman Associates, Diamond Bar, California.

Thomas G. Wicks III is Assistant Professor of Education Administration, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

Q: What is unique about the TESA program from other types of staff development programs?

A: I believe the unique feature is the implementation design. We not only researched the content of the program, we also evaluated the implementation component. Rather than simply sharing research information and the series of workshops, over a period of time incorporating peer group observation and feedback has provided the teachers an opportunity to internalize their interactions and behaviors toward all students in an equitable manner.

Q: Where do you envision TESA to be in the 21st century?

A: Hopefully I'd like to see TESA incorporated as a component in teacher preparation and training at the university level.

Q: Do you foresee a TESA II on the horizon?

A: I'm currently working on an adaptation of TESA directed toward administrators working with staff, the objective being to improve communication and increase productivity.

Q: How would you summarize your accumulated years of TESA training experiences of working with a vast number and variety of educators?

A: During the past sixteen years that we've been conducting TESA Coordinator Seminars, the thing I'm most aware of is the total acceptance of the program's basic con-

cept and objective. I believe this is due to the ability of participants to immediately identify with the concept from their own past experiences in the classroom.

Q: What has been the motivating force to continue making literally hundreds of presentations?

A: Although the TESA staff has had the opportunity to disseminate the program to thousands of educators over the past many years, we are aware that there are still many educators who are not familiar with the program. It is our hope that continued dissemination will assist many more teachers in being more effective in the classroom.

Q: It has often been said your personality seems to come through the TESA program. If this is true, what advice would you give a person contemplating a career in education?

A: Personally I believe that teaching is the most noble profession of all. No profession contributes more to a free and democratic society than the contributions made by teachers. The responsibility teachers have with students is awesome. We are in a position to shape young minds in a positive manner. For the teacher the rewards are limitless and can be most profound.

References

Kerman, S. (1979). *Why did you call on me? I didn't have my hand up!* Phi Delta Kappan.