

An Innovative Approach to Teacher's Training

Kay Scovill

November 20, 2001.

Innovative Teacher Training: The How, The What and The Why

To be effective, teachers need to clarify their goals for their students. Consciously and unconsciously, a teacher's goals affect the hundreds of small decisions that are made each day. It is the weight and momentum of these decisions that can bring about teacher and student change. Teacher training should also develop in teachers the capacity for discrimination and judgment rather than procedures and techniques. The focus of this article is teacher education for practicing teachers in Sathya Sai Schools. It is assumed that these teachers will already have certification degrees within their own countries and therefore, will not need the fundamentals of teacher education.

The Method

Teacher education is facilitated through interactive training, teacher mentoring and peer coaching.

□ Interactive Training

Interactive training is a formal training that involves all learning channels of the participants such as movement, music, graphic organizers, social and emotional connection to others, including the spiritual impact of the teacher. Interactive training is used to initially teach the concepts to a group (around 20 people).

□ Mentoring

A senior teacher guides and mentors another teacher through demonstration lessons, sensitive feedback from observations and through discussions focused on areas of concern chosen by the protégé. Effective mentoring provides opportunities to practice and integrate new ideas into their belief systems. This time to practice is crucial to make new learning 'their own,' not only through improving teaching and decision making, but also practicing values.

□ Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a group of teachers that join together to enhance their professional growth through working together either in pairs or small groups. By acting as a sounding board for one another through classroom observations, non-evaluative feedback, group discussions, and mutual support each participating teacher can enhance his or her professional growth. Collaborative support increase the teachers practice of values.

Teacher Education Content

Worldly Knowledge

The worldly knowledge that should be covered is how we learn and the process of learning. **Brain research shows we learn by:**

- a) moving and doing,
- b) listening and speaking,
- c) observing and picturing, and
- d) problem solving and reflecting.

Learners must create their own learning. Therefore, the more actively involved the participants are in the process, the more the learning will become their 'own.' The process of learning can be broken into four phases: **preparation, presentation, practice and performance.**

□ Preparation

This phase is aimed at developing the readiness to learn for the adult. Several items that must be addressed in this phase are overcoming barriers to learning, building connection and camaraderie for the learning group, and arousing interest or curiosity.

□ Presentation

This phase, presenting information, traditionally is overemphasized. It should be only about 20% of the total training time.

Presenting information to be learned by standing at the front of a group and talking does little to involve the learner in the process of creating meaning and understanding of the information. Learning occurs when time is given for the participants to create their learning from the information that has been presented.

□ Practice

The third phase of the learning cycle is the practice phase. This is a very important portion of the learning cycle for it is when the active learning connections are made for an individual.

Knowledge is not something you absorb; knowledge is something you create. Seventy percent, or more, of a total learning experience should be dedicated to actual practice.

□ Performance

The fourth phase of the learning cycle is the most important phase and that is performance. This phase has two aspects within it:

- performance during the actual training session, and
- planned continuation of the performance after the training sessions are over. Without this phase the other phases have no meaning for the goal is to put any new learning into practice in actual life situations. Success is in the follow-through, as any golfer or tennis player knows.

Spiritual Knowledge

Since the development of character is modeled rather than learned through discussion, the method of mentoring becomes very important to helping teachers discover new ways to respond to difficult situations in the classroom. Demonstrations, observations and feedback all help to link spiritual understanding with actual practice. The mentor can also help a teacher develop the ability to reflect on his/her work not only before and after lessons but also during the lesson.

A peer-coaching group, through discussion much like a study group, can work together to find ways to link their spiritual beliefs to actual practice. Topics to cover might be: developing the heart to heart connection, becoming aware of how our perceptions of children can limit or expand a child's possibilities. Personal development topics could include the need for self-control and self-sacrifice, the need for personal spiritual practice such as the light meditation and the Gayatri. The power of the peer coaching group is that the participants create their own understanding through the sharing of their teaching experiences and with the help of the whole group develop new ways of looking at the experience. It is important to connect worldly knowledge with spiritual knowledge in actual classroom practice. We have a longing for connection with God within...and God within others, through the interplay of developing these two connections through classroom practice comes learning and growth.

One model of effective teacher training

The Sum Is Greater Than Its Parts. We have reviewed several effective teaching methods. The ideal teacher education program is made up of a combination of these programs. Just like learning is made easier for the child when it is experiential and multi-sensory, so also teacher learning is enhanced through the experience of a variety of methods: **peer coaching, mentoring, interactive teacher training, self-inquiry, and personal spiritual practice.**

When the techniques of teacher skill development are combined with self-inquiry and personal spiritual practices, teacher development is greatly im

END OF EXTRACT