



The ImpaQT of Teacher Training

by Susan Tuttle

As a new teacher I, like many of my colleagues, had the belief I would save the world—at least a small piece of it, because I would inspire all of my students. As you begin this profession, there is a vitality and enthusiasm that carries you through those first difficult years. The challenges of a classroom cannot be realized without having gone through the experience.

That experience becomes invaluable with time, but unfortunately, time tends to dampen that vitality and enthusiasm. This is not to say professional teachers don't want to change their small part of the world. But there are a lot of circumstances that can become barriers. Teachers, new and experienced, need to be revitalized by acquiring methods and practices to overcome these barriers.

With more than 30 years of teaching experience, a master's degree in curriculum and an administrative certification, I can now look back on my career and the careers of my colleagues and, somewhat objectively, critique much of what I witnessed. This critique is not so much a criticism, but rather an evaluation and a realization that much of my teaching could have been more effectively learned by my students. It was that realization that convinced me to write the teacher training portion of ImpaQT.

Based on experience

My experience with teacher training was generally hit and miss and ineffective. I know that in discussions with my colleagues, they often felt the same way. I frequently heard, "Let's get this over with so we can get back to our rooms and get our work done." I doubt that my situation was unique. As well intentioned as the programs were, they were inconsistent—often, the trainer was a colleague who had attended a four-hour workshop (if that), and there was little or no follow through.

One districtwide meeting I attended epitomized the general poor training in our district. This was a large suburban district with more than 500 faculty members. At this meeting, the curriculum director stood before us and announced that the schools on one side of town—the demarcation line was arbitrary—would henceforth be outcome-based education (OBE) schools. This was during the period when OBE was considered the newest silver bullet. That announcement was our official training. During the course of



the year, we were sent articles on the process, and there was some discussion at faculty meetings. Needless to say, it was ignored.

Experiences like that one led me to believe that if teacher training was going to be effective, there were several necessary criteria:

- A need that is defined by an end result.
- A well-planned program to offer consistent and well-presented information.
- Follow through with the training.
- A means to effectively evaluate the training and the results.

These were my goals as I wrote the teacher training portion of ImpaQT.

No one can underestimate the effectiveness of a group of people that works closely together and toward the same goal. School districts often have great diversity within the staff, such as levels and types of education, experience and personal background. Although this diversity is essential in a healthy organization, a common vision can produce a common focus and purpose. When an entire district adopts that vision, then it is a matter of training the faculty in a manner that will lead to the desired results. In a districtwide program, the teachers would be able to get support and follow-through. The process would be ongoing and could easily become part of the culture.

An element of the training that cannot be ignored is motivation. As I created the document, I addressed student motivation as an important aspect of the program. Teacher motivation must also be acknowledged for the training to be successful. I have found that teachers generally want to do the best job so their students succeed. They are often motivated when they learn something new that can help lead to that success. It has been my experience that they can become resistant when their ideas and expertise are ignored and they have no input, but rather have been handed the latest and greatest educational gimmick. New practices that become a burden to an already busy teacher have a tendency to be put away in a file drawer.

Using tools

ImpaQT gives teachers systematic tools they can comfortably use without a need to change a teaching philosophy or to require extra hours of busywork. Initially, these practices take some time to implement, but if teachers are given that time and



encouragement, they can begin to infuse the tools within the classroom in a way that does not demand a need for them to change their philosophy or threaten their expertise.

When doing something for the first time, people generally want to know if it is being done correctly and if it is effective. If an entire district is following the same program, it is more likely the training will be followed through, as well as followed up on. It can become a major area of concentration over a period of time. It must also be understood it will take a period of time to fully incorporate and cannot be accomplished between September and winter vacation.

In a perfect world, everyone will agree on one way to accomplish the goals set by a school district. We work in the real world, however, with a variety of ideas. The tools put forth in ImpaQT may be used by individual teachers without compromising their effectiveness. It is not essential for it to be a districtwide policy for a classroom teacher to be able to successfully use the ideas and the tools within the program. Even on a small scale, results can be realized and documented as long as the goals are measurable and data is systematically kept. This becomes the means by which a teacher can evaluate the student, as well as the practice.

In general terms, it has been my experience that effective teacher training should include certain criteria. It should be goal oriented, planned and systematic, not an hour after school once a month on a hit-and-miss basis. The training and the trainer must recognize teachers' needs and use their experiences and expertise as a starting point. If training is for an entirely new program or practice, teachers need to be acquainted with the reasons for and benefits of the new material. They also must be given permission to take classroom time for implementation if necessary. Often, the curriculum is the driving force behind teacher practices, but recognition must be given to time spent for the teacher and students to integrate new methods within the structure of the classroom.

Concrete information

The purpose of training of any kind is to instruct the audience on new material or methods. This instruction should be presented in a way that will give teachers something concrete they can use in their own classrooms. The new information or practices should be ways that teachers can work smarter, not harder. If given too much information at



once, if the new practice is overwhelming in terms of implementation or if it is totally contradictory to the existing practices, it will be ineffective at best.

In writing the teacher training portion of ImpaQT, I was given the opportunity to create a training program that could be used effectively, had concrete ideas and tools that teachers could easily implement, was not overwhelming and could be adapted to a variety of situations. It gives teachers new, systematic practices that can be used based on their particular situations. It is flexible and quantifiable, and results can be readily observed.

If ImpaQT is a districtwide policy, it could be used as a consistent training tool. With that focus, specified results could be more easily tracked, depending on the district's definition of "quality" (for example, test scores, attendance and graduation rates). If the training is not facilitated by the district, individuals can determine their own measurable goals and track them to determine progress.

While there is no magic bullet, I see ImpaQT as an opportunity to improve student performance. It is a practice that engages students and can help keep the focus on quantifiable results they can observe and ultimately control. That can be a strong motivator for teachers trying to help students reach their potential.

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