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**Teacher Inservice Workshops And Professional Development Courses Are What University
Teacher Training Should Be**

By Ruth Wells

Today's teachers are prepared for yesterday's students. The truth is that college and university

teacher training has been stuck in the 1950's for the past 50 years. Content and testing have remained the central focus of teacher preparation, while students' behavioral and emotional problems became the central focus of the classroom. In essence, most teacher training programs prepare teachers to work with a student who no longer exists. Contemporary teacher training gives today's teachers yesterday's tools, leaving even the most talented educator sometimes feeling ill-prepared to cope with students of the 2000s who have moved far beyond a time of bobby sox and poodle skirts to cyber sex and nipple rings.

While it is unlikely that teacher college and university training programs will change dramatically any time soon, there is no harm in speculating about what the curriculum should look like now. Subjects that are currently covered only in teacher inservice workshops, professional development seminars and education conferences, should be routinely included as a major focus of professional training for educators. When this type of practical training is left to be an optional add-on that must be sought out, located, and often paid for with a teacher's own personal funds, it becomes far less likely that most teachers will ever update their skills. I know this is true because many participants of my popular Problem Student Problem-Solver Workshops (

<http://www.youthchg.com>

) tell me that they have to pay

for their own training, beg for days off so they can attend, and sometimes even use vacation time or forfeit their pay when their school can't or won't fund the costs.

Putting aside those concerns for the moment, in an ideal world, what might teacher training programs cover beyond content and testing? Here are the top 5 critical things that teachers are never taught but may really need right now:

1. Give Teachers Basic Juvenile Mental Health Training More and more students have serious mental health concerns yet most teachers don't know a conduct disorder from an attachment disorder. That's like not knowing the difference between arithmetic and spelling. When teachers don't know basic mental health information, it creates the perfect conditions for safety concerns to simmer and boil throughout the school and in the classroom.

2. Offer Teachers Real-World Violence and Safety Training Schools are more out of control than ever before. School shootings, gangs and bullies can pose enormous potential safety concerns yet few teacher training programs devote extensive course work to practical, preventative methods. Using character education—the current violence prevention method of choice today—to stem this type of violence is naive and ineffective. While character ed can work well with many students, it will always fail with some youngsters. With some populations, such as conduct disorders (who are an estimated 11–14% of students), empathy-based approaches like character ed will actually make the situation far worse. It is an approach better suited for Archie and Jughead, not the South Park kids.

3. Show Teachers How to Teach School Skills Years ago, families reliably taught their offspring to show respect, arrive on time, dress appropriately, and to have an appreciation for the importance of school. Now, many families cannot or will not instill those beliefs and teach those skills. If families do not teach kids how to be students, then schools must perform this function. Until then, teachers are

working with untrained, unmotivated students. Teachers need to be taught how to systematically train youngsters on all aspects of school functioning from punctuality to homework management, from how to raise their hands to how often to talk in class, and so on. Motivation should be given special attention, but typical contemporary teacher training includes almost no practical focus on that today.

4. Show Teachers How to Teach Coping Skills Because families are more likely today than years ago to be fractured, abusive, troubled and otherwise impaired, teachers need to know how to manage the problems that result when family problems come to school with students. A special focus should be given to what methods work with school refusers, withdrawn kids, work refusers, depressed students, traumatized children, and students in crisis.

5. Show Teachers How to Teach Social Skills If a student can't sit in a chair, talk one at a time, or keep his hands to himself, it makes it almost impossible to teach that child academic content. Yet today's teachers see dozens of socially maladjusted students each day. If parents cannot or will not train their offspring to have basic social skills, teachers must pick up the slack. A child who can sit in his chair, talk one at a time, and keep his hands to himself, is far more likely to be a teachable student. There are no shortcuts around the serious social skill deficiencies that educators cope with today. Until Susie can acquire at least minimal social skills, educating her may be impossible.

It is way past time to drag teacher training into the new millennium. If you are a teacher struggling to make sense out of your troubled, challenging students, the problem isn't you. The problem is that your professional training fits students who walked your corridors a whopping half century ago. If you want to learn the practical, updated, more effective methods that they didn't teach you in college, your only option now is to find an inservice course, workshop or professional development seminar that can upgrade your skills to fit contemporary youth.

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Older Teachers

By Brenda Townsend Hall

I met a retired engineer the other day and she told me she was half way through a TEFL training course. She wanted to know what I thought her chances were of finding a teaching job when she has completed the course. Well, I can't disguise the fact that there is a lot of age prejudice in the world of ELT. I think all sorts of reasons combine to make this a profession dominated by young teachers.

First, it appeals to those who want to be able to see the world and gain experience: inevitably it's the young who fit this profile. Second, if we're honest, pay is often unattractive in comparison to other professions and young people will tolerate that in a trade-off with their travel ambitions. Then schools themselves often appreciate the enthusiasm and energy that is associated with youth, not to mention that the young are more tractable.

Having said all this, I also know lots of young retirees who have found rewarding second careers in this field. If schools took a moment to think about it, these mature teachers have lots to offer. Their experience of life in its broader sense gives them additional "weight" in the classroom: in discussion, for example, or in that strange, unquantifiable quality called wisdom. Many cultures respect older people and students may have greater confidence in a mature teacher for that reason.

The older teacher can also have a calming and stabilizing influence on younger colleagues, who may find many aspects of their new career overwhelming. Where the more mature teacher has a background in another professional area, the school may well be able to make use of that expertise to offer ESP classes in that field. The engineer I mentioned would surely be an asset in a school where students were preparing to apply for a university place in a technical subject.

But having said all this, I think the age of the teacher should not really be an issue. The main point is, can the teacher do the job well? If so, surely that's what matters.

Brenda Townsend Hall, a contributing editor to *ESLemployment*, is a writer in the fields of English for

business, cross-cultural awareness and business communications. Interested in receiving TEFL job listings weekly for free? To learn more visit

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