

Contents of the RWCT Teacher Training and Training of Trainers Program

The staff-development training offered by the RWCT program is presented in nine short courses. The courses are delivered in a workshop setting over a 12-15 month period. The first eight courses deal with teaching strategies. The ninth short course discusses becoming a trainer and is given as part of a session that is also used to certify that participants have learned the content of the project, and are qualified to train others in the project's methods.

The workshops are designed to model interactive instruction and learning. They are built around *demonstration lessons*, with opportunities for reflection and practice, and require a detailed commitment from participants to apply the strategies in classrooms.

Following each workshop, participants use the methods in their classrooms and then attend monthly meetings in their own communities, where they discuss lessons they have taught and advise one another on ways to improve their performance.

Course descriptions

1. A Framework for Active Learning and Critical Thinking

Presents the rationale for critical thinking and interactive learning, and demonstrates a research-based three phase model for organizing teaching and learning. In phase one, students are encouraged to consider their assumptions about a topic, and frame their questions about it. Then comes phase two, the lesson proper, in which students remain active as they inquire and examine the topic. The third "reflection" phase, encourages students to consider what they have learned and compare it to their prior assumptions, question and debate the claims of the material, consider its implications, think of the topic in different ways, or apply the ideas to new situations. In this course teachers learn a preliminary set of teaching strategies for applying this three-part model. By the time they have completed the course, they will have learned more than sixty such alternative strategies, for use with different materials for different purposes.

2. Methods for Promoting Critical Thinking

Presents ways of using different levels of questions to evoke discussions of fictional texts. These range from "lower order" questions of fact and comprehension, to "higher order" questions that ask students to use ideas to solve problems, compare different points of view, or to evaluate the adequacy of a line of thinking.

3. Reading/Writing/Discussion in Every Discipline

Stressing the interrelatedness of the language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in an interactive classroom, the course focuses especially on techniques applicable to every subject area that uses reading and writing as means of learning. The course also demonstrates ways to enliven lectures, with questions and answers to heighten students' engagement and original thought.

4. Further Strategies For Promoting Critical Thinking

Revisiting the RWCT Program's three-part teaching model, this course presents further methods for use in all three phases. Here teachers learn several strategies for encouraging discussions, strategies for debate and for the analysis of arguments, and ways of using debates as rehearsals for writing argumentative essays.

5. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning methods help students learn material more thoroughly and deeply, and also cultivate more respectful relationships among students. Cooperative learning techniques are introduced and reinforced throughout the courses; this course shares a host of strategies for giving students active roles in helping each other learn.

6. Lesson Planning and Assessment

RWCT teachers operate under severe time constraints, and seek ways to promote critical thinking and active learning at the same time they teach their standard curriculum. This workshop presents a lesson-planning model that allows teachers to teach the required content, and at the same time helps students to inquire and reflect. Using the RWCT methodologies also shows teachers how to assess progress and even assign grades when their teaching allows more independence and creativity.

7. Writing Workshop: From Self-Expression to Written Arguments

Writing workshops create in the classroom the conditions real writers seek and the processes they use when they write. Personal writing offers students the opportunity to make meaning from experience, to form opinions, and to know each other more fully. This short course shows teachers how to use a workshop approach to writing, and how to move students along the spectrum from writing about personal experiences to more disciplined exposition and argument.

8. Creating Thoughtful Readers

This course shows teachers how to set up and conduct readers' workshops, which are intended to offer students a range of choices of what they read, while providing encouragement for deep reflection. The goal is to create reading experiences that are less contrived, and that foster genuine inquiry, as well as the habit of voluntary reading.

9. Becoming Trainers

It is expected that those trained in the RWCT methods will train others; but experience has shown that participants in workshops cannot become trainers without careful instruction in planning and conducting workshops, and in ways of training adults. Participants leave this workshop with detailed plans for their first workshops and also with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to prepare and conduct other trainings.