



Great Teachers Seminars Purposes and Outcomes

Purposes

The Great Teachers Seminar purposes have endured over 45 years and hundreds of permutations. They have changed slightly to adapt to different groups and themes. The purposes are listed below, with descriptions of the ways they are achieved in italics.

- To practice rational analysis of educational problems and find realistic, creative approaches to their solution.
Through small group success and problem paper presentations, informal discussions, and topical sessions, participants have many opportunities to present and explore solutions and strategies. Steps to problem-solving are described prior to the "problem paper" sessions, to assist participants in exploring solutions to challenges.
- To cause educators to venture beyond the limits of their own specializations in search of transferable ideas and the universals of education.
Innovation and success papers prepared by participants are presented in groups carefully constructed to have the widest possible variety of disciplines and backgrounds. Creative brainstorming is encouraged to respond to the problems. What participants have in common as educators is stressed, and the differences celebrated.
- To stimulate exchange of information and ideas within the community college movement by building an expanding network of communication.
The retreat atmosphere of the seminar encourages discussions and connections at a more personal level than most staff or organizational development events. All participants receive copies of the papers prepared by others, which enables them to contact and share information after the seminar. A culture is created that supports continued sharing of ideas, seeking assistance from each other, and risk-taking.

- To promote an attitude of introspection and self-appraisal and a humane, open climate in which participants can seriously review and contemplate their attitudes, methods, and behavior.

The ground rules and premises call for positive problem-solving and support. Free time and a retreat location provide participants time, space, and "permission" to pause to reflect on their professional values and goals. The quest for the great teacher (or leader, or college) invites participants to ask themselves basic questions about their profession and its purpose.

- To celebrate good teaching (or leadership, or a college) and renew the commitment to education.

The final activity is a culmination of the days' exploration of what is involved in great teaching, leadership or a college. The focus of the entire seminar is on the processes and attitudes involved in greatness.

The founder, David Gottshall describes the seminar as a movement because it is not associated with any organization and serves no commercial or institutional interests. He asks that there be no guidebooks or manuals "to prevent the development of 'true-believership' or fixed procedure . . . of which the education profession would soon tire". He has also described the seminars as 'tribal events', or gatherings of people with common connections to share stories and celebrate and reaffirm their culture.

Outcomes

A common problem experienced by participants is trying to tell others about the seminar and what happened, because the outcomes go beyond simply gaining new knowledge. Dave Nakaji, a participant, described the California Great Teachers Seminar (CGTS) as an earthquake whose "aftershocks spread themselves throughout all of California carrying an exuberant, boundless and almost defiant energy and momentum. The tremors generated not only race along the surface but burrow deep, cutting the educational landscape into meaningful patterns." On more mundane levels, many participants mention learning specific skills and techniques and talk about the contacts they made that become enduring support and resource connections. Many report being re-energized and renewed.

Following is not a comprehensive evaluation of the seminar. However, it is a revealing list of the outcomes most commonly noted by many participants after the seminars.

Outcomes

- Implementing one or more of the ideas they got at the seminar
- Increased openness and self-awareness
- Increased willingness and ability to solve problems
- Increased self-confidence and risk-taking
- Renewal and revitalization
- Increased willingness to be authentic
- Increased openness and commitment to students and the educational process
- Increased respect for and trust in their colleagues
- Broader awareness of a variety of ideas and strategies
- Increased contacts with others in the college and/or across the state
- Increased leadership roles and new job responsibilities
- Increased contacts with students in their classes and awareness of student needs
- Increased contacts with faculty both in and out of their disciplines
- Increased reading in professional journals and on teaching strategies
- Looking at teaching from new perspectives
- Increased team feeling and sharing of information
- Increased awareness of other points of view
- Recommitment to the college, increased loyalty and morale
- Revised or new mission and goal statements for the college
- Task forces and working committees established to further projects identified at the seminar, with broad based support.

Seminars focused on cultural diversity and/or concerns of educators of color have some unique outcomes:

- Validation of experience as a faculty or administrator from an underrepresented group
- Strong statewide support networks
- Appreciation for other racial and ethnic groups
- Empowerment

- Establishment of mentoring relationship
- Increased leadership roles, visibility, and involvement at the local college.
- Participants in seminars for administrators report (based on a more comprehensive follow-up survey conducted for the annual New Majority Administrators and California Administrators Leadership Seminars):
- Increased job responsibilities or promotions (45% in a three-year period, 20.8% in a one-year period)
- Awareness of different management and leadership strategies
- Greater confidence in handling personnel situations
- Greater knowledge and use of statewide resources

The outcomes described above show the purposes are being achieved, and that the elements and activities of the seminar do create an environment to enhance one's performance and commitment to one's profession.