

YOGA TEACHER TRAINING COURSE STANDARDS

If you've ever considered doing a Yoga Teacher Training Course (YTTC) you're probably aware that modern standards for Yoga Teacher Training are often inadequate. Students are rarely screened for proficiency, many are not ready to become teachers, the director of these trainings are not always adequately qualified to give the training, and the main regulatory body (Yoga Alliance USA) is not as effective as one would hope.

The business of Yoga seems to outweigh the ethics of adequate teacher training.

I would like to share my views with you on the matter, and explain what I decided to do in my own trainings to address these issues.

YOGA TEACHER TRAINING vs PRACTITIONER INTENSIVE

There is a muddying of the waters between teacher training and general practice courses. In a Yoga Teacher Training (YTTC), the emphasis should be on learning how to teach not on how to improve one's practice. A YTTC should be significantly different to a general practice course or immersion; the latter is where students learn what to practice, techniques on how to practice and some Yoga philosophy as to why you practice. Many teacher trainings should really only be considered "practitioner intensives" rather than qualifying someone to teach Asana or Yoga.

Conversely, a YTTC is for training experienced Yoga students to learn to teach Yoga. Ideally it is not for inexperienced students who want to "try it out". It is definitely not appropriate to give such students a teaching certificate. Once you understand and accept this point, then it becomes a lot easier to re-arrange the present (low) teaching standards. Having the appropriate experience does not necessarily mean an advanced Asana practice, but it does mean specific and sufficient understanding of the method in which you are seeking to gain certification.

This means that all trainees coming onto a training course have similar practice standards, experience, knowledge and willingness to learn. It makes the group harmonious and connected and provides a great personal environment for learning from each other.

By pointing out this discrepancy between a practice intensive and a true teacher training, I do not aim to prevent these lower level trainings from operating. Nor am I criticising their value - at least not all of them are poor quality, some do a reasonable job for the time and cost. They can also be a useful starting point for some practitioners. The point is to make a distinction between a course that has higher standards, and is actually training someone to teach vs a course that does not.

My long term hope in this process is to have the higher level trainings clearly indicated or displayed to the public through some kind of standardisation by consensus. The current format of Yoga Alliance USA is simply not doing the job.

WHO TEACHES THE TEACHERS?

A director of a teacher training (DoT) should have at least minimum 8-10 years practice experience and minimum 8-10 years teaching experience. Typically this would mean close to 20 years total prior experience as the practice time would mostly precede the teaching time. It is not ideal for someone who has minimal practical experience as a teacher to become a Director of Teacher Training (DoT).

As a prospective student/trainee I would ask to see the DoTs certificate of teaching to verify their experience.

PRE TRAINING ASSESSMENT

There is currently very little regulation around pre-training and assessments for student acceptance onto a TTC. If this is not regulated then it doesn't matter what comes after (the quality of the training course) the overall product (the standard of the teacher at the end) will still generally be low.

I think that a Director of Training should know every student, and know their practice and constitution well, before allowing them to attend their particular YTTC. If a student does not show adequate competency in practice and a certain amount of maturity they ought not be accepted. By competency I don't mean ability to do advanced postures, I do mean stability and awareness in the body (pro-prioception, focused breathing, alignment etc), and the ability to do a sufficient

amount of Asana in order to convey the method to others. By maturity I don't mean age, I do mean willingness to learn and take feedback, and adequate communication skills.

Personally I don't think it is adequate to simply accept a "letter of recommendation" from a qualified teacher in order to accept a student onto a course. If you haven't seen a student practice and observe them developing, you have no idea if a letter is showing anything of value. You have to watch the trainee with your own eyes, person to person. I might occasionally accept a student from a teacher I have personally trained (without seeing them first), but this would be the exception rather than the rule. All DoTs should know every prospective trainee personally.

POST TRAINING and SUPPORT

In addition I think all DoTs are (initially) responsible for the teachers they train to teach. If there is little or no contact after a course completes, then it can be easy for the new teacher to ignore ethical advice and teaching guidelines. If both the DoT and trainee are required to have some ongoing contact after the course completes (for example, a couple of emails within a 12 month period after completion the course) the the post training quality is maintained. This email check up would help to consolidate the trainee, provide support for any questions they may have, and help the DoT to prevent any recurring problems. Without this email contact and ongoing assessment, both the DoT and the new teacher are not held accountable for their actions.

Most importantly, ongoing post TTC training and support helps to improve everyone's teaching standard, both the new teacher and the DoT will become better teachers as a result. In this I can happily say my own standard as a teacher has improved a lot through accepting feedback and criticism from the students.

HOW TRAINING HOURS ARE UTILISED

A little while ago I was having a conundrum in re-arranging the training hours on my Level II Vinyasa Krama course. I had a total of 200 hours available, and was trying to fit in the different course subjects - too many subjects, not enough hours.

After some thinking on the matter, I asked myself a simple question. What is the course for? The answer: Helping the trainees gain the skills and confidence to teach Yoga-Asana. Once I answered that and I looked at the curriculum, I decided that helping the students to develop their personal practice was secondary. That was a pre-requisite, not a part of the actual training. Helping them to be better teachers is.

So rather than focusing on various techniques to help students practice, I eliminated most of those hours and replaced them with focus on teaching practicums. The students then have practical steps to increase both ability and confidence to teach the general public. So rather than 5-10 hours on teaching practicums our courses now have over 40 hours dedicated to actually practicing to teach. Many modern courses have less than 5 hours per person in this area (some have none!) and as a result, almost no one at the end of such courses is confident or competent enough to teach.

Secondly, all TTCs should have the majority of hours on a 200 hour course as contact hours. That is, teacher to student contact and training. If a course has more than 10% of these hours as non-contact the course is not adequately training students to teach. To learn to teach Yoga to others you must learn how to deal with real human beings, not abstract information and ideas.

VINYASA KRAMA TRAINING STANDARDS

To summarize my points above, here are the 8 principle guidelines I use on the Vinyasa Krama YTTC, which includes anyone running Yoga Training under our banner.

1. All DoTs have a minimum 8 years teaching experience and 8 years practice experience, totally more than 12 years consecutively.
2. Vinyasa Krama Teacher Training is for experienced students only (minimum 3-5 years prior practice for a Level II course, to be assessed individually.)
3. Appropriate pre-training assessment - all trainees practice with the DoT for a minimum of one month prior to the TTC.
4. All YTTCs involve 30-50 hours of teaching practicums. 90% of a 200 hour course involves person to person contact.
5. All YTTCs have 20-30 hours each on Anatomy and Physiology and Yoga Philosophy. All

teachers of this material will have the appropriate knowledge and experience to teach the subject adequately.

6. 10-20 hours on Ethics and Interpersonal Conduct. Although the number of hours on this subject may not be long, it is critical to teach this subject clearly, with time for feedback and relational advice.

7. Each YTTC accepts maximum 20-25 students to guarantee quality control.

8. Ongoing contact with the trainees to ensure post training support and assessment.

I encourage all students, trainees, teachers and directors within our Vinyasa Krama organization to be aware of these guidelines and to put them into practice. This means being responsible for all aspects of the process, rather than just your small part of it. So it's not just up to the teacher, it's up to the students to uphold these conditions also. In addition I am encouraging cross-tradition collaboration, so that teachers and directors from any of the Yoga traditions, new and old, can do the same.

YOGA ALLIANCE PROFESSIONALS UK

Recently I reconnected with Yoga Alliance Professionals (YAP UK) - I have known the owners for some time. We discovered we have similar views on Yoga Teacher Training, and the importance of trying to improve standards versus settling for the lowest common denominator. I recommend any trainee, teacher, or director of training to look them up and join their organisation. With ongoing collaboration between the regulating bodies, the DoTs, and the teachers and students, we can maintain higher standards.

The directors of YAP UK aim to differentiate themselves from Yoga Alliance USA, and by initiating conversations through articles such as this, and making connections across different traditions, we can bring some effective changes to the current status quo.

You can check out this link for more information.

<https://yogaalliance.co.uk>

Lastly, If you want to train to be a Yoga Teacher, my advice is to be patient enough to seek teachers and training courses with high standards and appropriate qualifications. If you take the time, both in researching this and in developing your practice ability and awareness, you can get the best training possible, versus something faster, easier, or even cheaper. It will definitely be worth the wait.

Please share this article!

Namaste

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