

STRETCH Your Mind

STRETCH Your Resume

by Jeannie McCarthy

Are you looking to improve your resume? Would you like to absorb sport specific information to use with your students ages 2-6? Have you been curious about the KAT and MELPD courses offered by USA Gymnastics? Herein lie a few answers and helpful telephone and web contacts. You, too, can earn certifications to post at the gym to proudly state, "I am a Preschool Gymnastics Professional!"

Imagine the following scenario. Thoughts before the KAT course: "Oh no. The Gym Owner signed me up for a seven-hour preschool teachers' course! I'm required to go. Oh, boy. I'm going to die of boredom!"

Mental adjustment during the sixth hour of the KAT course: "Man oh, man! I don't want this to end. All of us teachers from different gyms are sharing ideas. We are learning so much today."

Thoughts at the conclusion of the KAT course: "It's over! Where did the time go? Hurry up, Monday morning. I want my preschool gym students! I can't wait to try out these new ideas. Plus, I want to show off my new certificate stating that I passed the Kinder Accreditation For Teacher course."

KAT Course: Learning By Example

Mentoring with an experienced teacher is an effective method for learning how to improve your teaching skills. The KAT course provides this teacher to teacher exposure. Your KAT Instructor strives to be the epitome of a "great teacher" by keeping the workshop FUN. The full day workshop includes video clips, group gym activities, musical activities, games, and partner or small group problem-solving pods. Additionally, there are appealing lecture segments. Colorful PowerPoint slides and dynamic workbooks build upon the knowledge being shared.

Thirty to 45 minutes of the seminar is designed by you, the audience. Based on your needs, special activities are designed on the spot. Particular KAT audiences are highly interested in learning how to become better bar spotters, while others are interested in seeing how one complete lesson plan would be played out in the gym, set ups and all.

The KAT course covers an array of topics ranging from understanding children's developmental stages, learning styles and personality types, to effective class management and safety considerations specific to children under the age of six. Not to be overlooked is the wonderful information regarding engaging warm-ups, lesson plan concepts, and Parent/Child classes.

During the first phase of the KAT workshop you learn that the number one reason children quit gymnastics is that gym class is no longer fun. Your top goal after leaving these courses is to instill the element of fun and enjoyment in each class that you teach.

Does this sound like seven hours of dreaded boredom? Heck no! Stretch your mind! Stretch your resume! Attend a KAT course soon.



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Benefits of Certification

As a Preschool Gymnastics Instructor, it is imperative to acquire the current knowledge available to you. Who benefits? The benefactors are you, your students and parents, fellow staff members, and the owner's bottom line.

Personally, you benefit on many levels. The KAT discussion on children's personality types is an eye opener! How do you work with the volatile child or the all-knowing child? Attend the course to exchange ideas regarding working with these children. And after reading about the three main modalities of learning (auditory, visual, kinesthetic), how will this change your approach to teaching the children in your care? Do you know the 14 activities to avoid with preschoolers during a warm-up? The KAT workbook is filled with priceless information. This article provides but a glimpse.

Your students are the primary beneficiaries of your attendance at the KAT and MELPD courses. As an accredited teacher, you are newly aware of how to select skills and class activities which are age appropriate. Skill selection that matches the developmental stages of the children lessens frustration on the teacher's part, as well as adding enjoyment to the student's experience.

The parents benefit from your attendance at the courses due to the tremendous enjoyment their child experiences during your classes.



Your fellow staff members benefit from your shared knowledge at staff meetings and the added expertise that you bring to the preschool program as a whole.

How does the Gym Owner benefit? By having his profit center grow due to the word of mouth recommendation of the happy clients. When your gym program is offering developmentally safe classes, and the teachers show an appreciation for the psychological limitations of the

youngsters, plus the teachers are presenting well thought out curriculum, the end result is growth in the program.

We Don't Know What We Don't Know

The media has kept us abreast of the fact that children's health is declining. The average 2-5 year old watches 22 hours of TV a week. Only 32% of children age 6 – 17 meet minimum standards of cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and abdominal and upper body strength. Obesity among children 6-11 is up by 54% since the 1960's and super-obesity by as much as 98% according to a study by the Harvard School of Public Health. Our job as Preschool Gymnastics Instructors is "tres importante!"

Steve Stork, author of the MELPD workbook states, "Early childhood is a special time for exploring one's physical competency in dealing with the world. It's also a critical period for developing a wide range of fundamental skills."

Kudos to you if you are KAT Certified. But don't stop there! Be ready to sign up for the five hour MELPD course. The MELPD acronym stands for Movement Education and Lesson Plan Development. Stretch your mind! Stretch your resume! Become a MELPD Certified Instructor.

There is so much to learn! Highlights of the MELPD course follow.

MELPD: Developmental Considerations

Children learn in an integrated fashion. They learn physically, socially and cognitively. Learning is not compartmentalized to strictly learning through movement. For example, are we as preschool gymnastics teachers engaging the social aspect of the children in class as well as the introduction of pre-reading skills and simple problem solving tasks?

There is a fascinating topic discussed during the MELPD course regarding children's growth cycles. You will learn about myelination and how this affects the coordination of children under the age of 5. Myelin is a substance that insulates nerve cells and conducts impulses from the brain to the nervous system and musculature. Children under the age of 5 have 'gaps' in their myelin. Knowing this information helps you to realize why the children move so awkwardly at times. This sort of technical information is great to share with the parents!

After the MELPD course, impress your student's parents with your newly acquired knowledge.

MELPD: Cognitive Processes In Pre-school Age Children

A Child Psychologist, Jean Piaget, provides a brief explanation of how children think. Piaget describes that children are in the Concrete Operations stage of thought processes. What does this mean and how does it affect how I teach my students? Concrete Operations refers to children's poor concept of cause and effect. Students are often unable to self-correct during skill practice. To help a child to improve, you may have to demonstrate why his efforts aren't working and why your suggestions will work. Using the "If/Then" cue approach works divine. Here is an example. "Henry, you keep landing on your knees during your Mule Kick. IF you get your bottom up higher, then you'll land on your feet. We want to land on our feet. Okay?" Young children need explanations such as this due to their inability to correlate one action to another.

MELPD: Lesson Planning Primer

You'll have an enjoyable workshop discussing class formations that increase opportunities for student participation. Movement concepts that lead to an amazing variety of outside-the-box skill options will increase your curriculum repertoire. Have fun with your fellow course mates as you nit pick your way through understanding how to design progressions with pragmatic results: the kids will learn!

At the MELPD course you will learn to select skills and activities that are age-appropriate and de-emphasize hand spotting. Your outcomes will be positive as a result of your learnings.

Knowledge IS power. The MELPD Course has powerful information to assist you in writing productive lesson plans. General curriculum planning is addressed. The workbook contains 60 detailed lesson ideas. The ideas are a launching pad for your imagination. A "one-size fits-all" curriculum is not what you will find here. You are provided with the necessary framework in which to customize a curriculum for your gym.

Assessing your newly designed curriculum is a cycle that is encouraged as a follow through to your planning.

Your Preschool program can outshine all the others in your area by taking the time to design a customized curriculum. Do you offer an expanded curriculum? An expanded curriculum is not restricted to artistic gymnastics limited array of skills. Expanded curriculums include social goals, affective goals, academic content, and movement concepts of space, effort and body.



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Well-designed curriculum avoids the pitfalls of uncertain and haphazard results. The Preschool teaching staff feels purposeful when delivering lesson plans of content. Students tend to learn more in programs with preplanned objectives. Customizing curriculum for your gym takes time and talent. It IS worth the time!

The MELPD course purports that we as preschool gymnastics instructors have the ability to instill a life-long love of athletic involvement within our preschool age students. This should be a driving force behind our curriculum choices.

In A Nutshell

Here are current statistics of the USA Gymnastics created preschool teacher courses:

- 1) 3500 adult Preschool Instructors have acquired KAT &/or MELPD certifications.
Minimum student age is 16.
- 2) There are 30 National Instructors spread from East to West coast. Contact your local KAT Instructor today to host courses in your gym. The Instructors are listed on the web site www.usa-gymnastics.org. Hosting a course is free.
- 3) KAT was launched in 1995, MELPD in 2000.

Sign Up Today

If you have had the following thoughts, then enroll in a course today!

"I'm an 18 year old preschool gymnastics instructor and I'd like to be taken more seriously."

"I've been teaching gymnastics for 15 years. I'd like to add credibility to my work."

"I'm a Team Coach, yet I am required to work with the 3 year old kiddies. Help!"

The National KAT Instructors and USA Gymnastics would like to hear this across the nation, "As the gym owner, I am proud to say, all of our preschool staff is certified through USA Gymnastics in both the KAT and MELPD courses."

Note: The KAT and MELPD courses are workshops offered by USA Gymnastics as continuing education in an effort to raise the standard of instruction offered to preschool-age gymnasts. Any questions regarding the Preschool Teacher Certification Courses may be directed to Rachel Heath at USA Gymnastics, 800-345-4719.

Jeannie McCarthy has been a KAT Instructor since the inception of the courses nine years ago. At Congress 2003 she was recognized as one of the top six National KAT Instructors for the 2002 calendar year. Mrs. McCarthy is currently enjoying involvement with the students of Double 'D' Gymnastics in Media, Pa., as an Instructor and Curriculum Consultant. She can be contacted at gymtastics@aol.com.

* Each KAT & MELPD course is taught by a different instructor and may vary slightly.

Comments From Course Participants

Do you feel the content of the KAT workshop is relevant to your teaching? If not, why?

"Yes. I have gotten many new ideas for teaching skills, as well as gathering new information about safety."

"Yes, I learned a lot about development and overall class management."

"Yes, because a lot of this information I was unaware of."

"Completely, the booklet handed out is incredible and I know that I can and will implement some of the lesson plans and ideas."

"Yes, it will give me a better idea of how to approach the complex mind of my kids."

And: What is your overall evaluation of the KAT workshop?

"Loved the workshop, there was great info provided. Loved the hands on."

"It was awesome. I thought it was going to be a boring 7 hours but it was great. I had a ball."

"The overall evaluation of the KAT/MELPD workshop is very informational and beneficial. Also it is interesting to get other people's point of views and suggestions of other gyms."

"From a range of 1-10 (1 being horrible and 10 being unbelievable) my score is 12. Above and beyond expectation."

"It will be a great base for our program – Outstanding resource."

MELPD workshop participants were asked in an anonymous survey:

Do you feel the content of the MELPD workshop is relevant to your teaching? If not, why?

"Yes because of my young age, parents might question my knowledge and I need some sort of backup."

"Yes. It was extremely relevant."

"I feel the content of the MELPD workshop is very relevant to my teaching."

"Very pertinent information to define movement and learning for Preschoolers."

And: What is your overall evaluation of the MELPD workshop?

"Not only useful, but important information and knowledge needed in this sport!"

"Wish I had it earlier."

"Very useful information. I plan to use the lesson plans and internet resources."

"It was a really good workshop; I got a lot of information out of it."

"Very good and useful workshop."

Additional comments left on anonymous surveys:

"I've been out of the gymnastics program for 8 years. This workshop really helped me to get back into the swing of things. The program years ago was very different than it is now, it was a very good refresher to listen to the changes made throughout the years."