

## REFLECTING ON INSPIRING TEACHERS

- What were the values that made you decide to become a teacher in the first place? Make a list and discuss which of these values still hold true and which have changed. Have you been disillusioned in any way? Have your values been particularly inspired in any way by your teaching experience?
- What do you want your pupils to gain from having been taught by you?
- Has there ever been an incident in your classroom that you've regretted or that you wish you had handled differently?
- How does your teaching affect your health?
- Create a vision statement for yourself, for your colleagues or for your classes (create together) - not where you are but where you want to be.. Use "I am"...

### Values conflicts as causes of teacher stress

One of the biggest problems for teachers and their pupils can occur when there are conflicts in values. To address this kind of issue, Gratch (2000) recommends the technique of problem-based discussion, in which one teacher shares issues and concerns and the group of colleagues works to help this teacher better understand and resolve the problem:

1. Teacher presents problem
  2. Facilitator and group try to help teacher gain deeper understanding of problem and generate alternative interpretations through asking information-seeking questions and pushing for clarification and further refinement of problem
  3. Brainstorms possible solutions and develops initial plan of action
  4. At subsequent meetings, teacher reports on success of plan
- Write about 3 incidents (in the classroom, in the wider school, with pupils, colleagues or parents) that caused you to feel stressed or distressed.
    - Describe the incident in detail.
    - What, if any, effects did this incident have on how you define yourself as a professional? as a person?
    - Describe your feelings as accurately as possible. Why do you think the incident caused you to feel this way?
    - Describe the action you took and why you took this action.
    - How did others respond (ie the student/s involved, other students, colleagues, senior staff) and how did their responses affect you?
    - Reflect on and describe what you think were the feelings of the other people involved in the incident.
    - Were you able to draw on your awareness of your own values in any way to help in this situation?
    - If so, please describe what you did and how it helped.
    - Could you have dealt better with the situation? If so, what would you have done? What might have been the consequences of this different action?
    - What support did you really need in this situation?

- Brainstorm: 2 columns  
 Column 1: What are the worst problems you face as a teacher?  
 Column 2: What do you perceive to be the worst problems faced by students these days?  
 Examine any items from the two columns that are related in some way. What are the matches or mis-matches in values that are evident here?  
 Are there any mis-matches that could be addressed by looking at the situation from the pupils' point of view?

### Effects of your own teachers

The purpose of this question is to examine your own experiences as pupils at school, the way your own former teachers taught, punished and reacted to mistakes, and the effects these behaviours have had on 'programming' you as a teacher.

- Reflect for a few minutes on your own teachers. Who was your best teacher? What was he or she like? What did he or she do?
- In this activity, we would like to examine some of the negative emotions - anger, envy, guilt, fear and the effects that these might have on you as a teacher. Make 3 columns.  
 Brainstorm: What are the things that can make a teacher angry? List these in the first column.  
 Think about some of your own teachers and the way they acted or reacted when they were angry. List these reactions in the second column.  
 Next, try to remember how you felt when this was happening, either because you were on the receiving end, or because you were a pupil in the class witnessing the incident. Make a list of these feelings in the third column.  
 What about some times when a teacher might have been expected to become angry but didn't? Discuss the circumstances and whether or not these led to a satisfactory outcome  
 A similar exercise can be conducted with those of the other emotions that are relevant to you. Some alternative approaches to promote discussion might include:
  - Ask somebody in the group to describe a negative interaction and then roleplay it. Discuss the participants' feelings and then find a possible alternative and roleplay that
  - Write down your reflections on the scenario and pass them around (without names) for others to read and respond to
  - Examples of the questions: Was there ever a time when one of your teachers was untruthful about something? How did this make you feel? Was there any time when a teacher was bitterly truthful in a way that hurt you or another pupil?
- List some words that describe the classroom environment that you remember the most from your own schooling. Analyse each word and categorise them according to whether they are 'positive' or 'negative' characteristics. What are

the words missing from this list - for example, how many of the following are missing from your list: 'inner peace', safety to make mistakes, unconditional acceptance? Discuss: These days, what are the obstacles to achieving this kind of environment?

### Teachers as models of values

*"Teachers are remembered more for what they were than what they taught. "*

*"A teacher is the shining light to the world, but only if this light is shining all the time will it be able to light up other lamps. "*

*"The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive, for money, name or fame. [The teacher's real fulfilment comes when the work is] simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large."*

The above quotes by Sathya Sai Baba suggest that a teacher's impact on pupils and colleagues can be enhanced if he/she becomes a model of the values that are important to him/her and to their particular society. In this section we would like to suggest that if the teacher is able to examine the extent to which he/she becomes not just a role model for the human values but is able to live his/her own values in the classroom context.

- Consider the list of universal human values (attached). In what ways do you see yourself as being a model of the above values to your pupils? to your colleagues? And in what ways do you feel you really live any of these values in your classroom and collegial interactions? If you are discussing this question with colleagues, please include some specific anecdotes.
- In what ways do you think, upon critical self-reflection, that you fall short of being a model/living example of these values?
- What are your feelings about modelling these values. Is it something that comes easily to you and makes you feel good about yourself, or is it something that causes you stress because it's expected of you, rather than being the real you. What, if anything, can you do to change things so that it becomes a part of the real you, and not something you have to strain at?
- Do you think it is important for teachers to be constantly examining and developing their own values, or do you believe this is something static which cannot be changed? Perhaps you might wish to share your experiences with your colleagues.