

Activities and Reflections

1. In this chapter we have talked about the importance of adopting a positive approach to our thinking. Think of situations where you adopted a constructive way of handling particular challenges. Reflect on the benefits.
2. Is positive thinking a learned behaviour? Please give reasons for your answers.
3. How would you as an educator introduce and maintain positive thinking within your school?
4. Go back to the three factors about positive thinking put forward by Neck and Barnard. Try to see how you and your colleagues relate to each category.
5. Have you ever turned a negative experience into a learning experience?
 - a. What was the negative experience?
 - b. How did you turn your negative experience into a learning experience?
6. Inner leadership is about preparation, persistence and practice. Work round them to deal with at least two school issues.
7. What insights or new questions do you have as a result of reflecting on the ideas presented in this chapter?

Developing the inner edge

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Quality development in our schools requires an inner commitment by all school members. Connecting purpose with living is essential.

Cultivating the inner edge

THE MOVE towards greater devolution of authority to the school site is also bringing forth with it a spate of professional development courses in the broad area of school development planning. Practically all school senior management team members have been through various sessions on what can be termed 'how-to workshops' as school administrators are learning how to plan, carry out an audit, set-up management teams, etc. One assumption driving such programmes is that increased knowledge about leading creates better school leaders.

But to truly transform education so that all students can achieve to the best of their abilities, educators must also cultivate what has been described as the "inner edge". This inner edge comes from relating differently with ourselves and one another. It requires a deeper knowledge about self and a deeper connection with our purpose for living. It means being mission-driven rather than having a mission. It means working as vigorously inside ourselves as we do on the outside, material world of schooling. It means acknowledging that the unseen spirit that builds bridges with the self and with others cannot be ignored. Sergiovanni argues that what a person believes in, values, dreams about and is committed to hones the heart of leadership. It is the person's personal vision. Sergiovanni calls it 'the person's interior world' (Sergiovanni, 1992, p.7) which eventually becomes the foundation of his or her reality. Our

personal vision combined with an interior system of values together with the capacity of reflection, forms the underpinnings of leadership in action. These are what Sergiovanni calls the three H's, the Head, the Heart and the Hands (ibid., p.7). They have to work in complete synergy so that the Leader's decisions, actions and behaviour can be understood by those around him. Values may not get much play in curricula of management and leadership, but they count in the day to day life of an institution. Our value system determines what is truth, shapes our choices and defines our behaviour.

These are the principles that many schools are now having to grapple with. Whereas before everyone, to a large extent, led his/her own life independently of others, and therefore functioned effectively or ineffectively without anyone noticing or bothering now we are seeing that each and every person can and must make a difference to the plan that the school charts and implements. All schools are slowly realising that those that are willing to undertake that personal journey which will effect their own personal development as they seek to improve self and others, are finding many a stumbling block. Whilst many are willing to take up the challenges and risks involved in taking responsibility of their future, others do not want to upset calm waters and are dreading the opportunities that are being created to challenge the status quo.

There is a growing awareness that leadership now requires something more than content expertise. Some see personal and spiritual development as synonymous with leadership development. Developing a spiritual inner edge means that each individual must strip himself/ herself of any illusions of powerlessness. Each of us creates much of the reality we live. Many are those who constantly blame the system and as a result never commit themselves to any drive towards development. Developing a spiritual edge implies giving up defeatist, self-fulfilling prophecies. It means embracing a proactive stance rather than a reactive one and believing in each other's potential. Our actions and decisions are influenced by what we value and believe, as well as by self-interest. When the two are in conflict, values and beliefs usually take precedence.

Spiritual development, very much like physical and cognitive development, does not just happen. As Pearson (1998) and Sardello (1995), amongst others, point out heightened spiritual efficacy requires actively developing the capacities in three areas: awareness of spiritual influence, assessment of spiritual conditions and strengthening of spiritual intelligence.

Naturally, given the nature of this publication I cannot go into any details about these areas. It will suffice to mention that individuals are encouraged to look into themselves and to question their own inner beliefs as to who they are, what they are doing and why they are doing it in given ways. If teachers are apathetic, uninspired, unmotivated and cynical; if they constantly blame others for their failures; if they keep bringing up excuses for poor student achievement; if they are deeply discouraged than they need to connect with the spiritual direction that led them to teaching in the first place and with the power of their own spirit to affect the lives of students. They need an inner edge. Trying to develop a character without attention to values is like trying to develop the muscles of an athlete without having a particular sport in mind. A sense of commitment that is the psychological muscle that moral conduct requires is important but not sufficient. Values that direct the commitment are a sine qua non necessity. Etzioni claims that two requirements are at the foundation of most needs: to develop the basic personality traits that characterize effective individuals and to acquire core values (Etzioni, 1993).

This may sound foolishly sentimental. But I am sure that if we all had to stop and reflect on what matters, on what enticed us in the first place into the teaching profession, then we realise that where that spark has been extinguished then it is hard for such people to contribute towards the development of school initiatives. Teaching becomes just another job. Where this is a reality then leaders in schools need to have an important responsibility, that of reconnecting the spirit with the work of teaching.

Reconnecting spirit with the work of teaching

As school members are being encouraged to take on a more direct and participative role in determining their school's vision and direction this

implies that they have to overcome the climate of isolation and dependency that they were used to and start thinking and working in a collaborative fashion. No easy task as quite a lot of schools are realising. Over the years particular school members may have stopped trying, they may have been discouraged by people and events. Others do not have the desire or the skills to work with others. Others may have developed new priorities which do not embrace their role of educators.

When leaders and followers stop believing in themselves and their role, they stop trying. Content and process-based staff development alone cannot change this dynamic. This is a spiritual condition which has to be felt and faced. Going through it is the only way out; the only way out for those who really want to make a difference in the schools they form part of. This does not necessarily embrace everyone!

Building bridges

So how does a leader start this journey? There are varied ways of going about it. Here we will just mention the most obvious ones. One way is to help all staff members reconnect with the feelings of power and joy that brought them to teaching and learning in the first place. Encourage members to write them down and then to share them in an open discussion. Going back through the years and telling stories about high points in their lives can energize the staff. Such positive energy contained in past events is brought forward to charge present action.

Another method is that of using team building exercises. These will help members experience a state of connectedness with each other. And, the majority of people are hungry for a spirit of community. In isolation most people become unglued. They need one another to grow (Etzioni, 1993).

Engaging in role plays and simulations also help members tackle issues such as mistrust and conflict. Try videotaping and analyzing some discussion for evidence of negative words, and body language. These types of activities can

By addressing the self and more so being involved in school issues (simple, easy to carry out and in a short span of time) helps to nurture a spirit of community. This will help them to embrace the new demands and challenges facing schools.

If a group/school accepts the challenge to address the state of development or inertia that they are faced with they can turn cynicism into hope, failures into successes, dreams into reality. The spirit of success depends on the willingness to cultivate the inner edge. Is this the challenge that awaits you?