



The Teacher Foundation

Schools That Care

A Conference on the Social and Emotional Environment of our Schools

in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi

The Teacher Foundation (TTF) is a young organization managed by the **Shraddha Trust** that strives to infuse the school education system in India with energy, enthusiasm and expertise. In the past 6 years it has worked in significant ways with several thousand teachers from across the country – in government and private schools. TTF provides sustained professional development programmes, school-based support for teachers and school heads and educational services in the areas of school development, improvement and research and evaluation. TTF's work has been recently supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trust, GE Foundation, Reach India, Wipro Applying Thought in Schools, Akshara Foundation and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

The idea of the conference arose from our deep concern over a practice predominant in our schools and classrooms of “talking down to students”. This has very damaging impact on young people and the education system as a whole. We at The Teacher Foundation believe this problem needs to be addressed at a national level. A good beginning would be a conference for school principals, teachers and officials from the Department of Education all over India, **scheduled for 3rd 4th and 5th November 2008**, titled ***Schools that Care***. The focus of the conference is the embedding of students' self-esteem at the heart of all school curricula, especially in the primary years.

The Teacher Foundation (TTF) in collaboration **with NCERT** will organize the national level conference in **Bangalore, November 3rd to 5th 2008, at The National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS)**. Initial discussions with Dr. Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT and his Curriculum Team have resulted in their expression of both interest in the conference and willingness to collaborate. TTF anticipates that the ***Schools that Care*** conference will help bring the neglected affective domain of learning, centre stage in all our schools – both government and private.

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a concept note on the Conference Idea

- *Does the education we impart students take into consideration their unique personhood?*
- *Are we building opportunities for celebrating the success of all pupils?*
- *How emotionally safe are we in our schools? In the classrooms? On the playgrounds?*
- *How good am I as an educator at giving appreciation and encouragement?*
- *How can I build trust and confidence amongst the members of my staff?*

Increasingly questions such as these are going to nag all of us who are in education. But not many educators actually worry about these issues. And neither would they know how to address them.

The quality and language of personal interaction in our schools - teachers with students and students amongst themselves is often marked by harshness of tone, insensitivity towards others' feelings and a sense of inadequacy in expressing thoughts, ideas and feelings. Authoritarianism and judgement pervade majority of teacher- student interactions in schools across India.

In our classrooms we are primarily concerned with teaching and learning, but many of our children are unable to speak spontaneously and listen; they are unable to take turns to share ideas or to contribute to a group situation. All these are basic requirements for being well-adjusted



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future citizens of this world. They are also necessary in a classroom for effective delivery of lessons and syllabi on the part of the teacher.

Schools, therefore, need to actively nurture the ‘human’ side of student growth and development. But it’s easier said than done - for many reasons. One reason is that we are a class-ridden society, with many biases that get perpetuated by our schools. Another reason is that teachers themselves have been subjected to such interactions as students. It is this reality that they replicate, wittingly or unwittingly.

Objectives of the Conference – Schools that Care:

- Raise awareness amongst schools and the public at large regarding the overall ethos of schools in India with regard to the quality of interpersonal interactions in them.
- Create a policy document on ‘Setting standards for acceptable behavior of adults in schools’

Post Conference Intended Outcomes

- Policy booklet on **“Fostering the Personhood of Students”** for disbursal with NCERT approval
- Training and support for schools and teachers to foster a more nurturing ethos.
- Action Research Grants for work by practicing teachers on aspects of social and emotional well-being and development of children
- Academic Research by academicians

An Emerging Programme for the 3 Days

- **DAY 1:** Shades of our Schools
- **DAY 2:** Schools as Safe, Inclusive Spaces
- **DAY 3:** Schools as Healing Spaces

The TTF Thought...

It is becoming imperative that we reduce the disparities and disconnects that exist between schools and within schools in India. It is also important to ‘soften’ our schools so that they are safe learning environments for all our children.

No concerted attempt has been made nationwide to improve the culture of interpersonal communication that takes place in our schools. Though the National Curricular Framework 2005 makes detailed references to a policy of inclusion, nurturing an enabling environment and good behaviour through a policy of participatory management, schools don’t have a clear strategy to implement these ideas or to place social and emotional well being of our pupils at the heart of all school reforms. Most educational reforms in India have been restricted to developing literacy, numeracy competencies or physical infrastructure development.

We need to actively nurture the self esteem of staff and students and put into place clear listening systems which can eventually contribute to an inclusive, positive, caring and assertive *Whole School Behaviour Policy* so that all experience success in school - the gifted, the average and the special needs individuals.

One possible idea is to contextualise and adapt the **Whole School Quality Circle Time model** developed by *Jenny Mosley*, a well-known teacher trainer, drama therapist and author from the UK for effective use in schools across India (both private and government, primary and



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secondary levels). The model is highly flexible and can be adapted to various linguistic, socio-cultural and geographical contexts. It requires no additional expense for the school, apart from the investment on its teachers for being trained effectively for 3-5 days and thereafter being periodically supported and monitored across an academic year.



What's Quality Circle Time?

Circle Time as a structured group process teaches young people how to understand themselves and relate to others. The circle time method involves the teacher in a weekly half-hour meeting where all the participants including the teacher, sit in a circle and take an equal responsibility for solving issues the group members have themselves highlighted. The structures and techniques within Circle Time teach individuals to communicate more clearly, directly and honestly with each other. By learning to express their feelings in a clear way, they learn to develop positive relationships.

The strategies involved for children include cooperative games, pair work, rounds, drama techniques, and puppet play - each strategy appropriate to the emotional and intellectual level of the group. Through cooperative activities and discussion, circle time ensures that each child experiences success and, used on a regular weekly basis, it promotes a feeling of equal value and group identity.

At the heart of the Circle time model for pupils (from ages 2 onwards) is a period time-tabled to take place once a week. It involves the whole class sitting in a circle – non-hierarchical and inclusive – to learn relationship skills and explore issues relating to personal, social, moral and health education. The Circle meetings aim to encourage participation, the development of self discipline, negotiation, assertive communication and democratic group process alongside the skills of attending, speaking, listening, observing, thinking and concentrating.

Teachers trained in the Circle Time approach are able to get pupils to meet in a circle to engage in games, exercises, discussions designed to promote trust, respect, empathy and understanding.

Circle Time is a sustainable and replicable idea for the following reasons:

1. The Teacher Foundation has already piloted the Circle Time approach to fostering the social and emotional aspects of student development in several schools across India – and we have found the response has been always very positive, owing to its intrinsically humane person-centred approach. We have gathered feedback from a wide range of schools as testimony.
2. The idea requires no additional infra-structural costs – it works equally well in a small rural school as well as an up-market urban school.
3. The focus is on enhancing the personal skills and attitudes of teachers and other adults in the education system.
4. It places the raising of morale and self-esteem of teachers, as a primary strategy for successful implementation in schools.