

# MODULE 5

## SESSION 22 - The journey continues

### Main ideas

- Like the larger society, our schools too are ridden with hierarchies and inequality; unfortunately we take these for granted and seldom question them.
- These notions are often confused with discipline and the 'respect' owed to certain positions.
- We should be conscious of this in our work as teachers because though respect and discipline are necessary, the way we express and enforce them needs to be re-assessed.
- Exchanges between authorities, teachers and students, that is the culture prevalent in schools, reflects and impacts the culture of a society.

### List Of Materials

- Folded Poster:  
The pyramid of authority
- 2 Cue cards for Activity 1
- 6 Cue cards for Group work

In the last session we began looking at the near future when you will complete your professional course and enter a school. In order to be effective and to get satisfaction from your work you will need to brush up some of your skills and understand issues that will be crucial to your work as teachers. Last year we looked specifically at the school system and this year we have looked at our society. In the last 2 sessions we have again begun to look at our role as teachers and the relationships in our classrooms and schools. We looked at communication and the skill of framing and asking questions in the last session; in this session we will look at some more aspects related to our work.

### Recap

### Activity 1

Ask two students to volunteer for this activity and give each one a cue card that has a situation and a few points for discussion. The volunteers should read the cue cards to themselves to familiarize themselves with the contents. They should also rehearse in their minds how they will conduct the discussion with help of the points given. Give them about three to five minutes for preparation, then ask the first volunteer to read out the situation given and conduct a discussion with the class using the points provided. Then the second volunteer should do the same.

### What would you do?



#### Volunteer 1: Situation 1:

A class is in progress - the teacher has dissected a flower and is giving information about its different parts. One student is at the black board, drawing the parts of the flower by observing the sample in her hand. All the children have flowers and are closely examining them, commenting on the diagram being drawn. There is a lot of enthusiasm, excitement and discussion, resulting in some noise. While this is happening the Principal comes to the door and informs the teacher that the School Inspector is on her visit and will soon come to this class.

## Points for discussion:

- Do you think the teacher is doing her work well?
- Do you think the children are paying attention?
- Is the teacher in control of the class?
- What about the noise?
- Why do you think the Principal came to inform the teacher about the School Inspector's visit?
- How do you think the School Inspector will react to a class like this?
- Do you think the teacher should stop what she was doing and ask the children to sit down and listen quietly while she explains the diagram?

## Volunteer 2: Situation 2:

All the teachers are sitting together in the staff room, some doing their work and some talking amongst themselves. All the chairs are occupied. Another teacher enters – she is the oldest and senior-most in the school; everybody busily continues whatever they are doing. A parent who is part of the School Management Committee (established under the Right to Education Act) is brought by the school peon to meet a teacher; she is made to wait outside the staff-room. Just then the Principal comes in.

## Points for discussion:

- What do you feel will happen in the staffroom when the Principal enters?
- Is standing up and offering chair a mark of respect?
- No one offered a chair to the older, senior teacher. Why?
- Why do you think the parent, who is also the School Management Committee member, was asked to wait at the door? What do you think about this?

After the situations are read out and discussed, ask the student volunteers if they have anything to add. Then sum up the activity as follows.

These situations tell us a lot about the relationships and dynamics in our school. Designated authorities are given respect unquestioningly. Teachers even if they are older in age/seniority may not get such respect. Standing up, offering a chair, entering the staff-room with / without permission denote a code of conduct. Year after year, generations of teachers, students, parents and others go through these rituals and tacitly affirm their consent to them. Those who don't fall in line are seen as aberrations.

These common situations reveal the fact that there is both stated and unstated hierarchy in our schools. Whatever the kind of school, there exists a ladder of authority, a chain of command. We all experience this as young students and when we become practicing teachers we help maintain the pre-decided 'order'. Even during our educational experiences as student-teachers we are not encouraged to reflect on why we follow these patterns or discuss the deeper implications of these rituals on society in general.

The following activity will help us understand the structures of hierarchy in a school system – government or private - graphically.

### Activity 2

*(Do not spend more than a total of 10 minutes on this activity. This activity is merely to concretely put-down the everyday structures of hierarchy that we function within. The drawing/representation will help to realise that the issue of hierarchy is a real one and not an abstract idea)*

Ask the students to take out a piece of paper and make a diagram representing the authority structure that exists in a

#### The pyramid of authority



school set-up. Give them not more than five minutes to do this. Ask four/five of them to share their diagrams; they may all be quite different from each other – which is fine. Then show the folded poster to the class that shows the different rungs of authority that exist in our schools whether they are government owned or privately owned. Ask the class if they agree and if they would they like to comment on the poster.

### **Folded Poster: The pyramid of authority**

After the class has seen the poster and commented on it, continue with the explanation.

Even though there are a few variations in the drawings we made there are also many similarities. The common feature is that students as well as teachers are at the lower end of the hierarchy. Last year in Module 4, sessions 1, 2 and 3 we have studied the reasons why this happens. During the pre-British era the teacher was given great respect and unquestioned authority, but the student was powerless. After the formal education system was established by the British, the teacher became a government servant following orders from the authorities thus losing his prestige and independent decision-making powers. Today's exercise shows that the picture has remained unchanged since the British times.

Ask the students if they think that relationships in the school set-up should change. In what manner?

After they have given their suggestions, sum up the activity by drawing their attention to another, equally important issue.

These situations also brought forth another issue and that is of maintaining discipline. Stopping the ongoing class activities and standing up when the Principal or Supervisor/Inspector or someone from the Management visits is seen as a mark of respect. Similarly being quiet, speaking only when asked to, following instructions unquestioningly are also seen as symbols of maintaining discipline.

Ask the class what according to them symbolises discipline in the class/school and what signifies indiscipline. Conduct a brief discussion and write down the points on the blackboard. This discussion is meant to be a very brief warm-up and do not spend more than 5 minutes on the discussion and blackboard writing. Then proceed to the next activity.

### Activity 3

Call for six volunteers to participate in a debate. Divide them into two teams of three members each. Then explain to them the topic for the debate and the rules for conducting it.

Discipline =  
Punishment?



- These two teams will debate on the topic - All punishments should be banned in schools. This means that one team will argue in favour of the topic and the other, against it.
- The teams will be given five minutes for preparation; they have to discuss the issue and decide who is going to present which part of the argument.
- Each team member will get two minutes to present his arguments.
- One other volunteer should act as timekeeper and ring a bell when each speaker's time of two minutes is over.
- The rest of the class should, in the meanwhile, note down their opinions in their books, so that they can participate when the debate is thrown open to them.
- To start with, a member from the team that is arguing in favour of the topic will speak, followed by someone from the other team. In this manner, all six debaters will present their arguments.
- Anyone who does not agree with the speaker should await his turn - the speaker must not be interrupted.

Conduct the debate as described above. Then throw it open to the class so that other children can add their opinions.

At the end of the debate, reiterate the issues that have emerged. You can use the following points to sum up the discussion.

All of us agree that in schools, classrooms or anywhere for that matter discipline, that is, self-control leading to acceptable behaviour is essential for smooth functioning. In most schools and even at home children are scolded and even beaten if they do not 'behave properly'. Teachers and parents believe that they do this for the benefit of the children; that children won't understand unless 'taught a lesson'. They give examples from their own lives – "I learnt to behave because so and so was strict and even beat me solid", they say. Many also argue that children don't take beatings seriously; that they soon forget such things. But we must ask ourselves – have we forgotten the insults, beatings, punishments meted to us?

We may feel that news reports about children committing suicide due to punishment or teachers grievously endangering a student's life are exceptions but the fact is that in most schools shouting at children or beating them is the norm not an aberration.

Often instead of being helpful, corporal/harsh punishment affects the child negatively; instead of improving the process of learning, punishment hampers it. Thus the fundamental question facing us is – Discipline is necessary but how do we enforce it effectively? If beating children in the name of discipline is justified can we also justify beating adults to make them behave better? We need to accept that insults and beatings injure a person's self-respect and weaken his/her self-image. Many studies (for example the first PROBE Report) have shown that it has a direct impact on children being pushed out of school.

**The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child bans harmful punishment – both physical and otherwise. 27 countries in the world have made legal provisions banning**

such punishment. The Children's Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 forbids it and makes it a punishable offence.

It is necessary to recognize that violence and negativity do not solve problems; in fact the message we send out by punishing children harshly endorses violence and revenge. The problems remain unresolved or acquire greater connotations and hence it is important that we explore the concept of discipline further.

### Activity 4

Introduce the activity by making the following points; you may note them on the blackboard in brief.

- **What is discipline?:** Discipline, broadly seen, is a framework of expected behaviour, a code of conduct, that is essential for maintaining order and the smooth functioning of things.
- **Why do we feel the need for it?:** Predictability and order make it possible for things to be more efficient, less chaotic; this in turn helps in attaining the goals individuals and/or societies set for themselves. A pre-decided code of conduct is what makes living together possible. We observe many rules and observe discipline without being conscious of it. It is when we do something unusual or out of turn that we notice the aberration and call it indiscipline.
- **Rules must change with the times:** The purpose of discipline is to make smooth functioning possible therefore it is important that rules are clearly communicated to all concerned. Rules also need to be reasonable and fair. They need to be reviewed and suitably modified if they do not suit the needs of the times or are genuinely inconvenient/unfair.
- The consequences of not following rules should also be clearly spelt out; punishments, if any should be known to all parties.

### The many issues of Discipline



- At the same time, it is important to understand that unquestioning acceptance of rules is undemocratic and leads to regimentation, stifling growth. In such a situation learning is blocked, the creation of new knowledge and the development of the mind is hampered. Whether in our classrooms, schools, families or workplaces unquestioned hierarchical regimes can be dangerous.
- **Is there a relationship between ideas of discipline and a social culture?:** Yes, the culture of a society influences what patterns of behaviour are acceptable and which framework of pre-decided rules is followed. But this does not mean that such rules should override human dignity. Thus the unfair discipline enforced by age-old customs, traditions or even contemporary rules – like discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, economic status, or level of education etc. – must be challenged. This cannot be construed to be indiscipline.

**For true discipline to exist all concerned should take responsibility and feel ownership towards collective goals. For this everyone needs to feel the sense of involvement and respect towards each other.**

While all that has just been said concerns society in general, we shall now look at specific issues related to school situations. Self discipline is the final aim of our efforts to communicate the principles of appropriate behaviour to our wards. But the road to achieve that end is long and hard. In the meanwhile we have to learn to deal with situations of indiscipline or conflict which may test our ability to do the right thing. We will now look at some such instances.

Now divide the class into six groups and give them the cue cards, each of which has a situation, some questions to help

with the discussion and points for summing up. Give them about seven to ten minutes to carefully read the cue card and plan the presentation they will make to the rest of the class. One representative from each group should first read out the given situation, then discuss it with the class and finally sum up with help of the points given in the cue card.

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