



## **REFLECTION TOOLS FOR TEACHER QUALITY**

### **Title**

MY MOST REMARKABLE TEACHER

### **Goal**

The goal of this reflection tool is to stimulate reflection on personal experiences with former teachers as a starting point to make one's own teaching values explicit.

### **Targetgroup**

The target group for this tool can vary. It can be used with teachers, teacher educators, student teachers, headmasters and policy makers (and also in mixed groups) within an institutional, national or international setting. The group can have any size with a minimum of 8.

### **Description/Summary**

Participants are asked to write an individual appreciation letter to their "most remarkable teacher." Then, in small groups, they discuss their chosen teacher's most valuable qualities, for example: aspects of their teaching as well as their personality or their observable teaching values as well as their methods. Next, individuals from each group meet together in so-called "conference groups" to present the results of their individual group's discussion and to identify similarities and differences. In the next step, participants will then reflect on the teaching values which they themselves use in the classroom and which ones are essential to their work. These principles they will then present in the form of an informal poster for exhibition, thereby sharing their "manifestoes" with each other.

### **Methodology:**

The programme will be organized according to the jigsaw method; i.e., the participants will first convene in home groups, then later reassemble in new "conference groups," after which they will return for final discussions to their home groups. In creating home groups, it will be important to divide up the participants so that the number of participants in each group is as close as possible to the total number of groups (i.e., if there are 9 or 10 participants, there should be 3 groups overall; if there are 15 or 16 participants, there should be 4 groups overall, etc.). To create the conference groups, individuals within the home groups should count off into 1, 2, 3 (or 4 or 5 if need be), with individuals from the different home groups who share the same number comprising the new conference groups. If there are only 8 participants in the session, then the facilitator may choose to have only two home groups with a subsequent conference group comprising all session participants. The facilitator may alternatively choose to hold a plenary session of all participants for the



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conference group discussion if division into separate conference groups proves to be too complicated.

### *Step 1: Home Group*

#### *Individual work (30 mins)*

1. Write a letter to the teacher, who has remained in your memory as the most remarkable one you have had. You can tell him/her such things as to what you experienced being his/her pupil, who was he/she for you, why you value and remember him/her in a special way etc.
2. Re-read your letter and see if you notice various aspects of his/her personality, classroom mannerisms or teaching methods that influenced you strongly. Can you identify any particular values that seemed to be exhibited in his or her teaching?

#### *Group work (30 minutes)*

Share your thoughts about your most remarkable teacher with the other members of the group. During the course of the discussion, each participant should note the teaching values and methods of all identified “model teachers” and assess to what degree they share such pedagogical skills and practices in their own work.

### *Step 2: Conference groups (30mins)*

1. Within this new group of teachers, share the list of teacher qualities and values you have composed from listening to the other teachers in your own group, adding new attributes as appropriate.
2. With the other members of the group, identify and discuss those pedagogical attributes which seemed to be most prevalent.

### *Step 3: Home groups (60 minutes)*

1. Share new ideas or identify important teaching patterns from your discussions within the conference groups.
2. At this point, each participant should make a new list of attributes pertaining to what might constitute a “most remarkable teacher.” Then, on a poster, using words or—if the participants wish, graphics as well—to display this manifesto of what constitutes “a most remarkable teacher” for display within the session room for final review by other session participants.

### **Variations:**

Letters can be written before the session thus saving time.

If desired, participants rather than a letter can also compose a journal entry or write freely on the subject of their most remarkable teacher. In this instance, participants



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could be encouraged to “return with one’s thoughts to one’s own school days, to whatever memories or level of schooling, and recall one’s most favourite or significant teacher. Try to remember any specifics of the actual class, the subject taught, the way the teacher looked and acted, what exactly made him or her so special for you?”.

### Background & Resources:

This session draws from recent theory on narrative self study where teachers examine their own experiences as students in order to inform their own current and future pedagogical practice. It also takes into consideration theoretical models of reflection of Fred A.J. Korthagen & Angelo Vasalos and Robert Dilts’ NLP levels of learning and change.

See e.g.:

- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives. From career stories to teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9, 5/6, 443-456.
- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Teachers and their career story: a biographical perspective on professional development. In: C. Day, J. Calderhead & P. Denicoo (Eds). *Research and Teacher Thinking: Understanding Professional Development*. London- Washington, Falmer Press, 198-220.
- Loughran, J. J., & Russell, T. (2002). Improving teacher education practices through self-study. London; New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Ritchie, J. S., & Wilson, D. E. (2000). Teacher narrative as critical inquiry: Rewriting the script. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Korthagen, F. & Vasalos, A. (2005). Levels in reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional development. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 11(1), 47-71.
- Dilts, R. *From Coach to Awakener*. [ <http://www.nlpu.com/What's New/> article: [From Coach to Awakener](#) ]

Finally, a particularly powerful [example](#) of the result of teachers reflecting on their personal qualities and values through writing to their former teachers is described by Katleen Pithouse, who worked with South African teachers. Here, though, as newer teachers had no positive memories of their older teachers, negative ones served as a starting point for the exploration of the subject, whereas in this proposed session more positive linkages between the old and the new will be explored.

### Conditions:

Sometimes it seems to be easier for participants to write down characteristics of their “most remarkable teachers” than to compose a letter to him/her. Either approach would be appropriate as the opening activity for the session.



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If the groups are mixed in terms of age, subjects taught, level of education, etc. this diversity can have a positive impact on the session's dynamics, broadening discussion and facilitating deeper reflection.

### **Materials:**

Regular writing paper, poster paper, markers and adhesive tape.

### **Strengths & Weaknesses:**

#### *Strengths:*

Exploring individual memories about a particular teacher who had a significant influence on someone's life creates a natural context for a discussion about the quality of teaching. It also provides the opportunity for session participants to make more explicit to themselves which pedagogical values guide them in their daily work as teachers.

#### *Weaknesses*

In some cases negative memories of teachers are more dominant than the positive ones. However, it is important that participants, with the facilitator's encouragement, try to keep looking for his/her best teacher at any level of education.