

Seeing Others as Yourself

By Meena Srinivasan



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We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. —MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Educator Parker Palmer often talks about how teachers teach who we are; the most important way we teach is through our authentic presence. We can't teach peace or happiness; we must be peace and happiness and transmit our state, our way of being, to our students.

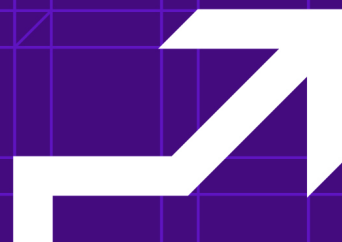
In W. H. Auden's *The Old School*, the author writes, "For a teacher to be of real value to his pupils, he must above all be a happy person." It's not always about what you teach but how you teach it, and the love and joy behind your teaching is perhaps the strongest impression you will leave with your students.

Relationships are fundamental to teaching. Cultivating empathy has the potential to develop powerful connections with students. One of the foundational ways we cultivate empathy starts with really listening to our students. We can use the following phrases to help us listen in a deeper way.

Breathing in, I listen to my students. Breathing out, I hear what they say.

Empathy involves understanding another person from his or her perspective. You put yourself in others' shoes to try and experience what they are feeling. Seeing students, colleagues, and parents as yourself increases compassion, altruism, and prosocial behavior—essential qualities for a thriving school community.

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In preparation for classes, faculty meetings, and parent conferences, try to see yourself as your students, your colleagues, or the parents of your students.

Before connecting with people, this practice can help you gain perspective and go into your class, meeting, or conference with much more ease. For example, if your students act up try to remember what it was like when you were their age and chances are you will then be able to approach the situation in a much more authentic, light-hearted way.

Here are some sentence stems to help you think about how you can really bring this into your teaching practice:

- "Breathing in, I see myself as the parent of _____ (student's name). Breathing out, I recognize we are a team and we want the best for _____ (student's name)."
- "Breathing in, I see myself as _____ (student name). Breathing out, I recognize that _____ (student name) wants to be seen, heard, and valued."
- "Breathing in, I see myself as _____ (colleague's name). Breathing out, I recognize that _____ (colleague's name) wants what's best for their students."

Now invite your students to make their own sentence stems! The following sheet can be used to guide students through this activity.

Note: You might consider framing your students' sentence stems on characters from a book, movie, or even a historical event that you are studying in class to give students a shared experience for practicing perspective taking, and to avoid any conflicts or accidental disclosure of personal/family information, if that best suits your classroom environment.

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Seeing Others As Yourself: Student Edition

Grades 6-12

Empathy is the ability to sense and imagine what other people are feeling. You can imagine what another person is feeling when you put yourself in their shoes, or see things from their **perspective**. When you practice empathy, put yourself in another person's shoes, and think about feelings from another person's perspective, it empowers you to be **kind** and **compassionate**!

Practice seeing things and understanding feelings from another person's perspective by finishing the sentences below, filling in the characters, events, and actions based on your teacher's guidance.

- Breathing in, I see myself as _____. Breathing out, I recognize that they felt _____ because _____.
- Breathing in, I see myself as _____. Breathing out, I recognize that they wanted _____.
- Breathing in, I see myself as _____. Breathing out, I recognize that they may have _____ (action) because they felt _____.
- Breathing in, I see myself as _____. Breathing out, I recognize that _____ probably felt _____ when _____ (other person) treated them _____ by _____ (action).

Reflection

What was challenging about taking on another perspective?

How can you make a difference in other peoples' lives by considering their perspectives?
