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## Dealing with Disruptive Students

*“Day-to-day school teaching normally takes place in a rather unusual setting: a small room, often inadequate furniture and space to move, a 50 minute time slot (or less) to cover set curriculum objectives, and 25-30 distinct, and unique, personalities, some of whom may not even want to be” there (Rogers 2006: 20).* These are some of the problems a teacher faces in his professional life. This essay aims at giving general tips and techniques to control behaviour students in a typical classroom at school level.

### **Keywords:**

(i) Dealing with disruptive students (ii) Problem students in a classroom (iii) Misbehaviour in classroom (iv) Dealing with mischievous students in a classroom

### **Introduction**

Cognitive development theory of development, given by Piaget, states that cognitive abilities develop in predictable stages, from a very egocentric type of moral reasoning to one based upon a system of justice, cooperation and reciprocity (Slavin, 2003, p. 53). Therefore it is the responsibility of teacher to observe carefully to determine if his students are working within their zone of proximal development. Are they experiencing success with their current level of support? Additional challenges can be provided for those working below.

Motivating students, assessing prior knowledge, communicating ideas effectively, assessing learning outcomes, reviewing information, taking into account characteristics of learners and managing the classroom are some of the techniques that help make a good teacher (Slavin, 2003). To achieve this objective the Behaviouristic Model of B. F. Skinner and Lee Canter (Le Francois, 2000, p. 449) remains highly teacher centred, least permissive and most directive in nature. Behaviour modification techniques such as reinforcement, modelling and punishment are the principal recommendations. Jacob Kounin and Rudolf Dreikrus proposed (Le Francois, 2000, p. 449) a relatively student centred Democratic Model. The model suggests that inappropriate goals, faulty understanding of consequences and illogical assumptions and conclusions are believed to be some of the causes of misbehaviour. Their principal recommendations are that a teacher should be democratic rather than autocratic, should set reasonable limits, and use techniques of reasoning, logic, meetings, and discussion to identify goals, point out logical consequences of behaviour, and rule setting. Carl Rogers and

Michael Marland advocate Humanistic Model based upon a highly learner centred (constructivist) instructional philosophy and diagnose poor self-concept as the basis of misbehaviour. The model recommends that minimal intervention, supportive environment, and encouragement of self-discipline are the key factors in achieving greater classroom control (Le Francois, 2000, p. 449).

The teacher has to act as a doctor and come up with a viable solution, which is obviously easier said than done. In fact we want to deal with applied behaviour analysis and discussing specific strategies to prevent it (Alberto and Troutman, 1999; Walker and Shea, 1999).

### **Identification and study of behaviour and development of strategies to handle disruptive pupils:**

Alder believes (cited in Le Francois, 2000, p. 458) behaviour is motivated by one's desire to attain certain goals. Basic principle in behavioural theories is that if any behaviour persists it means that it is being reinforced. To reduce misbehaviour in the classroom, a teacher must investigate factors reinforcing and maintaining behaviour (Slavin, 2003, p. 386).

The most common cause of misbehaviour is seeking attention – of the teacher, the peer group or both. Attention seeking disruption, if in initial stages, can be handled using the ignoring technique. If the same behaviour continues then some timely and thoughtful follow-up is imperative. In one-to-one sessions teacher can make clear to the student what s/he is doing something in the class and even why, and engage the student's co-operation with understanding. Such activities help student understand and take responsibility for his actions (Rogers, 2006, p. 159).

If misbehaviour is reinforced by peers then the teacher has two options either to remove the offender from the classroom or deprive him of group attention. The other is adopting group contingencies as described by Slavin (2003, p. 387), which involve that the whole group is rewarded for the misbehaviour of one student.

The other important tool for dealing with misbehaviour is release from boredom, frustration, fatigue or unpleasant activities. Attractive and varying activities, involving good success and immediate positive rewards (even if small rewards like verbal encouragement) make sure that all students are challenged and involved while none are overwhelmed.

Sometimes more systematic methods of applied behaviour analysis are needed in a class where most of the students are well behaved but a few have persistent behaviour problems. The steps of such applied behaviour analysis programme (Slavin, 2003; Presland, 1989; cited in Le Francois, 2000, p. 462) are:

1. Identify target behaviour(s) and reinforcer(s); a structured individual misbehaviour management program should aim to change only one behaviour problem at a time.
2. Establish a baseline for the target behaviour. Ascertain the frequency of the target behaviour and its effects on the class. Choose a criterion for reinforcement of improving behaviour. For example praising, privileges or tangible rewards to see if it works.

3. Select a reprimand criterion and plan a series of steps for reprimand if the student fails to improve.
4. Observe behaviour during program implementation, and compare it to the baseline.
5. When behaviour management program is working gradually reduce the frequency of reinforcement.

Stubborn and argumentative behaviour shows power seeking student who is neither to be fought with nor forgiven (Dreikurs, Gunwald, and Pepper, 1982). Now the teacher has to:

- Recognize that the student already enjoys legitimate power.
- Grant the student power where appropriate.
- Ask for student's help when possible.
- Respect the student.
- Avoid power strife.
- Reach an agreement.

The job of teaching requires a lot more rationalization of the causes of the problem and judicious handling therefore teachers should **stop being authoritarian and treat students with care and consideration.**

They should adopt a democratic view that the teacher should spend some time with students at the beginning of the year working out ground rules for interaction in the classroom (Roffey, 2004). What he thinks is reasonable within the framework of the regulations already enforced by the institution. Students should know that there are consequences of misbehaviour and these consequences should be clearly defined. Choices to comply and warnings before consequences enable students to develop and exercise self-control.

According to Kounin, (cited in Roffey, 2004, p. 50), an effective teacher has well planned routines. He is well prepared and gives attention to individuals and groups. Lets students know by eye contact or gestures that he is aware of unwanted behaviour. Pays minimal attention to minor disruptions and provides positive feedback.

A caring and inclusive attitude is helpful in rapport building and the teacher gets a good start. Now, when he explains certain expectations of work and behaviour, students listen and try to come up to expectations (Roffey, 2004).

The teacher has to be careful about the feelings both emotional and intellectual (Glasser, 1986). Students always enjoy working with the teachers who have a sense of humour, who can utilize funny phrases and facial expressions which help creating warmth and defuse tension.

#### **A Discipline Ladder may be designed and followed by the teacher:**

Canter & Canter (1992) advocate assertive discipline model on the premise that teachers have become too permissive, too lenient. This model gives the teacher the right to:

- Set firm and consistent limits.
- Provide consistent positive encouragement to motivate students to behave properly.
- Tell them what behaviour they are expected to develop.

- Take time to teach behaviour management.

Canter's discipline model provides teachers with a viable and clear set of instructions and procedures to adopt in a classroom. It has the advantage of involving both parents and administration for the management of students. Another positive point about this model is insistence on rights and responsibilities of both teachers and students but it legitimizes the use of punishments.

Humanistic educators, on the contrary, believe this model asserts too much behaviour control. It pays too little attention to dignity and self respect of students. There is no room for autonomy and self-direction. The use of punishment and negative reinforcement can result in negative consequences (Le Francois, 2000, p. 475).

Behaviour management involves ideas and strategies to prevent misbehaviour. Grossnickle and Sesko (1990) detail some procedures that are important in classroom discipline management. Some of the rules are as follows:

- Establish clear behavioural guidelines; expectations of students and teachers from each other, standards enforced by the institution should be clear to teachers, students and parents.
- Teachers, students and parents all form a team with one clear objective of educating children.

Design and complete discipline ladder, which may involve a hierarchy of various practical steps and a mechanism for complaints as well. The hierarchy of discipline ladder starts with:

- The corrective look.
- Corrective hand sign.
- Rule reminder (Rogers, 2006, p. 79).
- Change of place to stop reinforcers.
- Punishments exercises.
- Repeated warnings.
- Time-out/detention.
- Letter to parents to seek their help.
- Referral to the head teacher.
- One day exclusion.
- Two days exclusion.
- Five days exclusion.
- Permanent exclusion.

In addition there should be a complaints mechanism (Strut, n.d.) to augment discipline ladder.

*“One obvious source of behaviour problems can be the lesson and the quality of teaching.”* David Wright (Wright, 2006, p. 45). Therefore **there should be a strong lesson plan and must be followed in true spirit as far as possible.** Of various types of lesson plans the most frequently referred to is the “developmental lesson” (Kraut, 2000). Lesson plans may consists of the following components:

- Lesson objectives: demonstrated in student's performance and evaluated by the teacher (Kraut, 2000, p. 38).

- Lesson materials needed: tangible and sometimes intangible objects required to help achieve objectives of the lesson.
- Lesson Aim: it is a statement informing the class of a lesson's purpose.
- Warm-up: this is a sort of motivational device which helps students recap their knowledge about the topic and related ideas.
- Activities: actual activities which a teacher may envisage to be helpful.
- Feedback and Closure: this part consists of correcting the mistakes or reinforcing the idea conveyed in the lesson. Closure contains an introduction to the next lesson to help pupils think in advance.

A teacher acts as a facilitator and supervisor. All activities are so linked that transition from one activity to the other becomes seamless. There is no over-dwelling on any activity. All available audio visual resources are exploited, based upon the idea of appropriation.

A teacher enjoys the choice of making necessary amendments to the lesson plan according to the demand of the situation. This deviation must not be more than two or three minutes because deviation, for a longer period of time can seriously damage the lesson plan leaving it ineffective.

**Teacher should try to prove himself a resourceful person:**

Being one of a few role models a student may wish to follow, a teacher has to be a resourceful and knowledgeable person. Therefore, it is imperative for a teacher to remain informed about latest trends and techniques in teaching. Reading educational journals, periodicals, active participation in discussion forums - online and offline - attending and participating in seminars and lectures, visiting other teachers are some of the activities that can help a teacher grow professionally. A knowledgeable teacher seldom faces behaviour problems as he keeps students actively involved in the learning process as he is well aware of the fact that an empty mind is devil's workshop. He has the ability to come down to the level of students and start developing from that very level.

Students find it very hard to associate their learning to their daily life so it is estimable that a teacher draws examples from real life. For example a teacher of mathematics can show the implementation of the mathematical concepts in the real life.

Confidence is a trait in a teacher that helps gain control over any unforeseen situation. This is partly associated with personality traits but it is also associated with knowledge-ability of the teacher – in terms foreseeing the situation on the basis of readings and past experiences. A teacher may help nurture the qualities of investigation and creativity, utilizing library resources by giving them reference to the material appropriate to their age and educational level.

Learning best takes place in healthy atmosphere of the class so a **teacher should encourage fun and variety in the teaching environment.** Equipped with a variety of techniques and methodologies and the ability to demonstrate a commitment to creativity and fun in teaching and learning a teacher injects antidote to monotony and boredom to the classroom environment. According to Downing (1997, p. 35) to become a creative teacher

is to combine good teaching with creativity of the teacher. A devoted teacher has to keep abreast with the latest developments in the field of education and technology, because teaching today is the marriage of technology and educational philosophy. This role of a resourceful teacher can be best enacted if the teacher is not hindered by lack of resources. There are many techniques and resources that are inexpensive and yet promise a high success rate.

Resources can be of two types first is internal resources while the other is external resources. Internal resources are a lot inexpensive for the teacher to utilise, as these are already present in the institution the only job a teacher has to do is to use his creativity and imagination to recognise and utilize them in his teaching. Resources on internet which are obviously quite inexpensive, guest speakers, resource persons (may prove a little burden on the institution's exchequer), and educational visits are some of the external resources. A committed teacher prudently utilises internal and external resources to bring life and vigour to his class.

### **Conclusion**

When it comes to practical aspects one tends to form an eclectic approach towards theories of behaviour and teaching. There are a few common causes of misbehaviour, teacher has to identify discipline issues and prioritise them, to devise a strategy to handle them one after the other. A teacher should try to develop rapport with the class and chalk down rules with the active involvement of students, for the running of classroom affairs, so that learners become more responsible and responsive. These rules should be used in the formation of a discipline ladder which should be in a written form. The administration of the institution, teachers, students, and parents team up and work hand in hand for the common goal of educating the youths. Lesson plan plays the vital role in education so a teacher should pay special attention to it because a poorly built lesson can drain all the enthusiasm out of the pupils. A teacher should be full of resources, and use his creativity to induce fun and variety to his teaching.

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