

## Strategies for Dealing with Student misbehaviour

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, the reasons for student misbehaviour in classroom have been explored and strategies have been suggested for teachers to cope with the problem more effectively. Grappling with student misbehaviour in the classroom takes up teachers' sizable proportion of time and it adversely impacts the quality of the student's learning. An analysis of the root causes of student's misbehaviour in the classroom reveals three aspects: students, teacher and society. Appropriate steps need to be taken for controlling the problem successfully, from averting to punishing, building good teacher-student rapport and ensuring effective teaching and learning progress. Ways need to be explored so that a teacher might effectively cope with the situation. Teachers can minimize occurrence of negative behaviour by pre-empting the misbehaviour and building a positive relationship with their students.*

**Key Words:** *Misbehaviour, student-teacher rapport, pre-empting misbehaviour.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

A teacher may envisage himself to be a sage professor with rapt students paying attention to every word he utters; but the actuality of classroom situation is quite contrary. He encounters in the classroom with some problematic students whose behaviour is detrimental to the educational process. His experience in his classroom is such because the classroom is merely a microcosm of the outside world. He needs to understand the behaviour of his students and realistically select coping strategies to effectively deal with disruptive student behaviour like showing disrespect for others or getting the discussion off track. He needs to ponder over methods to convert these kinds of emotionally charged classroom interactions into probabilities for consequential dialogues in which students engage in "cognitive and emotional inquiry and open-minded discussion"[1] on matters. He needs to generate a climate for questioning, both cognitive and emotional, and develop skills for mindful listening. Teachers should be able to effectively deal with misbehaviour because it is a perilous for good discipline and also hinders the educational and social advancement of "good children" who happen to be in the same classroom with "bad children".

### 2. DISCUSSION:

Students' misbehaviour may be arriving behind time for class, leaving early, talking in an inappropriate manner, or sleeping during class. Misbehaviour might vary from simple non-compliance (like not being attentive) to plainly seen disruptive behaviour (e.g., flinging a paper missile across the classroom). Lately, faculty has reported more menacing demeanours like stalking, intimidation, verbal or even physical attacks. If ignored or handled poorly, these may escalate to unbearable or risky levels and can have a far-reaching impact on classroom environment and the "quality of the student's learning." [2]

An effective problem-solving strategy for managing disruptive student behaviour uses a checklist of steps intended to understand the context of the problem behaviour and then help engender responses. It is important for a teacher to clarify the problem, the factors which contribute to such behaviour, describe the mindset because of which the behaviour happens, and then scrutinize his own emotional and behavioural responses to the behaviour.

Students with behaviour problems usually come from poverty-stricken homes, may belong to a lower strata of society, may have a single-parent or a badly managed home. Family troubles, such as absence of parental monitoring and below par interactions in the family may also affect student bad behaviour. Misbehaviour may have originated because of poor quality of parenting, improper rewarding or inflicting punishments by parents, parental discord and approval of bad behaviour. Once the situation is fully understood, teacher needs to choose a response and assess the efficacy of his plan of action.

#### 2.1 Inability to Describe the Problem Clearly

Making a hasty assessment about the roots of the trouble is a recipe for failure. If a teacher becomes irritated or highly emotional, he might just react without understanding the situation.. May be he personalizes a student's behaviour and feels that he did something which made the student to react, but actually the rowdy deportment may have got to do

nothing with the him or the class. Careful understanding and evaluation of misconduct before taking constructive action is a technique that requires practice and reflection. At times resolution is better if time is taken to understand the behavioural style and various alternatives are considered rather than the problem behaviour is handled immediately. However, there could be occasions when postponement is not advisable. For instance, if psychological turmoil heightens rather than mitigates with the passage of time, then immediate professional intervention is preferable. It is beneficial to describe the behaviour without inference and to relate emotional responses. So, instead of making inferences like “You are aggressive,” or “You are lazy”, the behaviour itself should be described. Instead of saying, “You are aggressive”, try saying, “You kicked the chair” or try saying, “You submitted only one out of four assignments” rather than saying “You are lazy.” Also, understanding time patterns may provide clues to the cause of the problem at times. For example, lateness could be because another teacher dismissed his class late. Restlessness and disturbing talking near the end of class may be tackled by organizing a small group activity in the latter part of the class. Students who are seated beside their bosom friends are more likely to chit chat. Implementing a seating plan can minimize such chatting, enable the teacher to learn names of students and reduce disruption. The problem behaviour could also be due to unclear or inappropriate signals for assignments or exams. Bending of rules for one student may lead to other students' demand for similar treatment.

## **2.2 Events outside the Classroom**

At times associations and happenings outside the classroom may influence a student's classroom behaviour. For example, falling in love, death of a loved one or being chased by an ex-boyfriend could be impacting classroom behaviour. The teacher needs to be alert enough to observe and then delicately question the student so that he or she reveals the source of the problem (try to say, for example, “I observed you were inattentive in the class. Is everything all right?”). Both teacher and the student can then move on to ways of not letting outside issue affect classroom behaviour. Often non-judgmental and empathetic listening suffices, but at times counselling is warranted.

## **2.3 Heightened Emotional Reaction**

Sometimes, a teacher's heightened emotional reaction to an incident impedes his problem solving potential to generate numerous efficacious remedies. When upset, there is likelihood of his saying or doing things which can escalate the matter and estrange his students. For instance, if he feels that a student's behaviour is a personal attack on him, he may try to restore control by getting tough or intimidating the student. But instead of solving the problem, such counter-aggression proves to be counter-productive. A harsh personal reaction requires a cooling-off span for being calm before action is taken. The problem should not be dealt with unless there is emotional stability and the issue should be approached at some specified time later on. To avert the student's doubts of being put off, commitment to that appointment should be demonstrated by writing it in the schedule. Also, the teacher needs to question himself, “Have I in any way contributed to the troublesome incident?”

Teacher's examining his own behaviour from the perspective of his students, knowing that may be he has not been objective and then seeking a sincere outside opinion, not merely an approving opinion can prove to be beneficial in recognizing the true error, correcting it and having better relations with students.

The chances of misinterpretation can be minimized by giving clear directions about desired behaviour to ensure better compliance from students. Apart from giving clear-cut guidelines, students should be given choices also so that they can feel in charge and are inclined to shoulder more responsibility for their choices. Giving effective directions can be hard. Samples of common but unclear instructions include: “Participate in class interaction” or “Good.” Effective directions clearly specify required behaviour. For example, a student can be told, “Offer a question, an opinion with an example, or a response to another student's statement”. Effective directions also specifically state the amount of behaviour, for example, “Offer at least one comment during discussion”. The direction of the behaviour also needs to be stated, for example, “The comment has to be pertinent to the topic and should be significant”. If a student “misbehaves” all the time poses questions but never gives his opinions; talks too much or not at all; brings up extraneous material or offers a joke, the teacher needs to examine his instructions for appropriate behaviour which he should be stating right on the first day of the class.

## **2.4 Student motivation**

It is essential to tell students on the very first day of teaching the relevance of the subject matter in the big picture as it boosts their motivation and better their classroom behaviour. Students can be asked to write a paragraph on the advantage of the course they have opted, which factors motivated them to choose their major and what sort of life they want to be living ten years down the line. Making them think and pen down reasons may help them to rationalize their choices, keep them motivated and improve their learning.

## **2.5 Learning Difficulties**

There is a direct correlation between students' encountering learning problems and having behavioral issues. When students perform ably in their class and often get praise and rewards from their teacher, they nurture a positive feeling about their school and about themselves. They are keen to toil hard and cooperate with their teachers. Conversely, when students have low academic skills and encounter learning difficulties, they have low self-esteem due to their constant failures and are constantly sceptical about their capability to master new tasks. And all this negativity triggers misbehaviour.

## **2.6 Irritability due to Illness**

College students are likely to neglect their health and being in pain, feeling ill, or even chronically ill in some cases, can make them irritable and inattentive. Some illnesses may lead to sleep disturbance, due to which a student may fall asleep in the class. A student facing this kind of a problem may simply refrain from attending class instead of admitting his personal medical report to his teacher who is vexed at his "misbehaviour." College students may suffer from some mental illness like depression and have personality disorders which obstruct their interpersonal relationships. Students with these problems are quite a challenge to deal with and might be required professional referral. Also, recent generations of students are vulnerable to hearing loss due to overuse of headphones and exposure to deafening concerts. Biggish classrooms may be quite exasperating for such students. Eyesight or aural problems (especially unidentified ones) of either a student or teacher fuel the likelihood of misinterpretation and the possibility of annoyance.

## **2.7 Fatigue and Discomfort**

At times fatigue could be the cause of irritability. As exams draw close and time pressures mount, irritability increases, and civility vanishes. Students may have taken up multiple jobs or night shifts apart from pursuing studies. Pulling an all-nighter could lead to inattentiveness and interpersonal insensitivity. If classrooms are too hot, humid or chilly, chairs are not comfortable, or class timetable is such that it hinders a student from eating routinely, students become prone to irritability, which may be expressed towards others.

## **2.8 Emotional Challenges**

A teacher has to make up his mind whether to intervene or not when a student is behaving uncivilly due to emotional challenges. Behaving empathetically to a student when he is distressed or angry can defuse certain situations. Private discussions with colleagues or counsellors can enable the teacher to determine whether a student is in need of referral for professional help.

## **2.9 Loss**

College students are adults who may feel depressed, withdrawn or isolated when faced with loss-- the loss of a loved one or loss of childhood home and all these feelings may be vented out as fury or as hyperactivity. At times, the entire class (including the teacher) may have to come to terms with a loss (for instance, the death of a classmate). Then the teacher needs to inform the shocked and numbed class of the facts about the loss so that everybody gets time to absorb the news and express their feelings. Students who want to attend funeral services should be granted permission to do so.

## **2.10 Attention Seeking**

Instead of watching carefully and praising the "good behaviour" of a student, if the teacher spends a lot of time catching hold of him behaving badly, and tries to tutor him against unacceptable behaviour, he encourages misbehaviour in the classroom because of the student's attention-seeking psychology. The teacher should pay attention to a student when he is engaged in acceptable behaviour and ignore or give minimal observation to his impermissible behaviour. A lonely student may have learnt to seek attention through his theatrics. A teacher needs to carefully attend to such a student when he is behaving properly and ignore him when he is disruptive. As the student learns how to draw attention for good reasons, his self-promotional antics may lessen.

## **2.11 Blaming the teacher**

At times a student targets his teacher for the expression of his emotion. It is easier for him or her to blame someone else rather than accepting own responsibility. In case of poor performance in exams, he or she expresses his resentment as, "The teacher gave me an F." The teacher may justify that it is the student who has to earn the grade, but the student remains unconvinced and is not ready to accept responsibility.

Traditional college students are in the process of building their identity, learning the meaning of independence and they might be thinking of trying to challenge power and authority. Students may find it safer to challenge their teacher—a surrogate parent—than to challenge their biological parents. In some way, the student could be trying "practicing" on his teacher and on his college surroundings.

## **2.12 Norms for Conduct**

The very first day and exposition of syllabus are very crucial for establishing expectations for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and for demonstrating the seriousness of rules. If rules are not clearly elucidated, then compliance is less likely. As an unwritten rule, a teacher can get “easier” but not “stricter” as the semester progresses.

## **2.13 Class Size.**

The size of the class will have an effect on the norms laid down. Large classes may prompt students to behave as if they were in a movie theatre or were watching television. A teacher must clearly specify his directions and deliberate on ways of managing class control (by using seating charts, for example). Collaborative learning activities may erode the hurdles that a large class poses between a teacher and his students.

## **2.14 Task**

If disruption concerns an allocated task, the teacher needs to examine the degree of difficulty of the task element and the clarity of instructions for carrying it out. In case of a take-home exam, for instance, the minimums and limits on the length and on the resources expected need to be clearly specified. Too much expectation from students, if their knowledge and skill-set level is limited, may cause exasperation and anger. And though a student may be angry at himself for not being able to successfully accomplish his task, he may express his anger toward his teacher. The teacher can utilize this as a chance for teaching the student how to grapple positively with the inevitable challenges that he will face in every sphere of life.

## **3. Teachers as Causes of Misbehaviour:**

It is quite possible that students' unruly behaviour in the classroom is a reaction to their teachers' attitude towards them, which seems atrocious to them. That is to say, teachers' abominable actions can provoke students to misbehave. When teachers are boring, cannot teach, their discipline is weak and when they make unjust comparisons, students get provoked to misbehave. A teacher needs to exercise authority and manage classroom control and discipline. He should be able to make his authority acceptable. For that he needs to build a positive friendship based on the respect of his students once they have accepted his authority. A teacher's personality attributes also play a vital role in establishing classroom control. It becomes easy for a teacher to earn respect if he is kind-hearted, warm, unbiased and fair in his judgment of his students' behaviour. Also, a teacher needs to pay attention to his physical appearance and his voice quality. A soft-voiced teacher might take classes on voice control and the problem might lessen. Also, a teacher's attire selection and hairdo can also undercut his authority or enhance it. He can make a statement by how he appears. The way in which he prepares and organizes his lesson (so that his students are able to understand), the way in which he indoctrinates, the way in which he talks to his students and the way in which threatens, rewards and punishes them are all important. A teacher's unreasonable action can incite student misbehaviour as an endeavour to preserve his sense of self-dignity in the situation that he encounters. All teachers need to be mindful of how their deportment can act as a blockade rather than further good discipline in the classroom.

## **4. Modifying Teacher and Student Behaviour :**

Students notice their teacher and their classmates and mimic behaviour that generates approval and commendation. If their teacher acts uncivilly towards them, there is likelihood of their behaving similarly with him or with their peers. If classmates exhibit uncivilized behaviour but the teacher fails to respond immediately, he becomes role model for other students and it proves to be the detrimental for the class. On the other hand, if the teacher rewards good behaviour, he sets the standard for expected behaviour and generates a conducive environment for learning.

When a student offers a comment but his teacher criticizes or makes a sarcastic comment, it leads to sarcastic an aggressive environment. On the other hand, if the teacher asks other students in the class to state their observations, it can help in depersonalizing commentary. If a teacher yields to whining or to outflow of temper, he conveys to students that uncivilized behaviour is acceptable. If he ignores impermissible behaviour, students may understand his silence as assent and the repercussions will be undesirable. In case immediate action is essential, the teacher should tell the student to get in touch with him after class or to step into the hallway for a moment. The most desirable resolution of conflict occurs when both the parties are calm. At times it helps to postpone discussing the problem for a day or two.

## **5. Dealing with Student Misbehaviour :**

When transmitting to a student about disruptive behaviour, the teacher should avoid making inferences while giving behavioural examples. The student's conduct should not be termed as “angry” or “out of control” and focus should be on what was observed. For example, it should be communicated to the student, “Thrice you started speaking while I had the floor,” instead of saying to him, “You are rude.” Stating that the conduct is unacceptable and explaining what the student needs to do is beneficial. The teacher might say, for example tells the student that he needs to raise his

hand and await acknowledgment before speaking, there are chances of achieving compliance. But if he tells the student, "I need you to be more polite", the inference will be ineffective as "politeness" is open to interpretation. Merely stating a preferable behaviour does not ensure compliance on the part of the student because students are not puppets, they are human beings who will exercise their freedom of choice. But if the student continues with disruptive behaviour, the teacher may speak to the departmental head or dean of students' affairs and get the student excluded from class. Actually, the teacher needs to be assertive, and not aggressive or passive. If a student is very agitated, behaves very inappropriately and starts shouting, the teacher should not take risks with the class or him and seek professional intervention. He should not meet the highly agitated student alone behind closed doors.

At times even looking silently at a student showing inappropriate behaviour may make the student realize that the teacher is observing what is happening. By tactically ignoring, the teacher can avoid "over-servicing" attention-seeking student. At other times, verbal intervention through non-directive statements, questions and directive statements are required. A teacher needs to move from the non-directive statement, "I saw you fling the paper ball", through questioning, "Why are you doing that?" to the directive statement "Don't do that again!" Asking a student to furnish reason for his improper behaviour can lead him to be conscious of his mistake and avoid repeating it. Finally, a teacher should be keen to give remedial support to students who behave improperly due to academic problems, instead of confronting them over the misbehaviour itself.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

A teacher dealing with a problematic student should have multiple plans to deal with him so that he is able to select a realistic coping strategy and feel more in control. After appraising the various questions and probable explanations for problematic behaviour, he should be ready to formulate alternatives for dealing with the behaviour. Although this problem-solving approach to disruptive classroom behaviour is a rocky road and not a smooth progression, a teacher needs to try out several strategies during a class. A course of action which worked very well with one student may fail miserably with another and there is no sure shot recipe for success as there are too many variables. Self-introspection and discussion with experienced educators can be quite useful for honing the skill of effective behaviour management. "Interpersonal problem solving is partially a skill to be mastered and partially an art to be cultivated." [3] Teacher being the controller of the classroom, must have the confidence to solve the problem of bad behaviour.

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