

Creating a Basic Classroom Structure

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Viewing a prime aspect of a teacher's service as helping his students achieve self-discipline, we will now begin looking at techniques for keeping order and giving instructions. Using these simple techniques, even Kali-yuga students who tend to be unsubmitive will be influenced into obedience. We have previously spoken of a teacher assertively and directly demanding adherence to the basic structural rules of his classroom. These rules should not be more than what a teacher actually requires to effectively teach within a given situation. Here are some examples of typical rules useful for a class of young students:

- No calling out; raise hands and be recognized before speaking.
- No hitting, kicking, or fighting with other students.
- Follow the teacher's instructions the first time they are spoken.
- Stay in your seat unless you have permission to move.
- Walk, don't run in the classroom.
- Before class begins, stand silently at your desk with your hands folded until you are given permission by your teacher to be seated.
- Rise from your seat and stand with folded hands when adults enter the classroom

The first requirement for making an effective classroom structure is to decide upon rules. Ask yourself: Which rules do I actually need to run my classroom? If a teacher is not clear about what he requires from his students, his students will certainly have no idea what is expected of them. Keep in mind that the specific behavior you want from the children should be analyzed and stated in clear terms. For example, a rule stating that students should "be good" is too general and therefore will be ineffectual. Defining good behavior in clear terms such as "Share the paint supplies," or "Sit at your seat," gives the students specific instructions that are easier to follow.

No matter what activities his students are engaged in, from chanting during guru-puja in the temple to eating prasadam, a teacher must be always aware of the basic structure he requires from his students. He can then directly instruct his students, making them aware of the required behavior. Here are examples of direct instructions a teacher may give to students:

"clean up" "no speaking back to adults"
"no drum playing allowed" "no stealing"
"speak one at a time" "listen to whomever is speaking"
"line up" "enter the temple room on time"

At different times teachers may insist upon specific behavior. During japa time, for example, teachers may insist that students do not speak at all. During writing class a teacher may allow speaking, as long as the noise level is low enough so he cannot hear any one student's voice. Not all of the above rules and strictures should be applied at once by the teacher. One gurukula I visited had a long list of eighty-six rules that students were required to follow! Neither teachers nor students could remember the rules or take such a list seriously. I recommend teachers enforce no more than four or five rules at any one time. This simple list will establish the basic structure for that circumstance. If a teacher firmly adheres to that structure, simple as it may be, the students will quickly accept the rules as law and gradually become ordered. And, within the confines of the sanity that a strong basic structure brings, students can effectively be given other freedoms.

Get their attention, then instruct

One simple but essential principle when directly instructing students is: before speaking, make sure you have your students' attention. Neither yell nor shout, but in some peaceful way, capture your students' attention before you begin. I have seen teachers ring a bell, clap their hands and then pause, begin by whispering, and ask their students to first fold their hands before they begin speaking.

Implementing the structure

Before a teacher institutes his structure, he should spend time explaining his rules to the students. Clearly explain each rule's meaning. Ask the students if they have any questions. These rules can later be posted on a sign or on the bulletin board within the classroom.

Requesting behavior changes

When instructing students who are not following the structure, teachers may have to insist a student change what he is doing. We have already learned about making requests to students in assertive, non-assertive, and hostile ways. Let's now examine other ways to request behavior changes.

There are four general methods to request a student to change his behavior:

1. The hint: "Everyone should be chanting now."
2. The question: "Would you please begin chanting?"
3. The "I" message: "I want you to put your hand on your beads and begin chanting."
4. The demand: "All right. Begin chanting!"

The rule of escalation

If a teacher is always yelling at his students, what will he do when they don't comply with his instructions? What will he do next to intensify his demand? An escalation teachers often turn to is "paw!" They escalate from a verbal chastisement to a physical one.

And if a teacher is always angrily hitting his students, what are his alternatives when an escalation is needed? "If you don't do what I say, I'll kill you!" we hear an irate and frustrated teacher screaming. But how should he follow through if his students don't comply.

On the other hand, if a teacher is always speaking softly, even a slight raising of his voice becomes a powerful escalation.

The rule, therefore, is that a teacher should generally act at lower levels of intensity so he has more levels to escalate to without becoming frustrated or violent.

Using hints, questions, I-messages and demands

Taking into account the theory of escalation, whenever possible a teacher should use a hint, a question, or an I-message. These are lighter than a demand. Most students will respond to them, and they do not carry the implication of an impending consequence as does a demand. A demand states, "Do this or else!" Hints, questions, and I-messages do not imply the threat of consequence for non-compliance.

All too often teachers make demands when they do not intend to follow through with consequences for non-compliance. If teachers do not follow through on their demands, they are informing their students that these stronger statements can also be neglected. It is far

better, therefore, to only make demands if one is prepared to follow through.

Before making a demand, ask yourself, "What will I actually do if the student doesn't comply?" If you are not prepared to follow through, it is better to use a hint, a question, or an I-message. Demands are more insistent. The less they are used, the more effective they are.

When you make a demand, be prepared to follow through on it.

Adding power to direct statements of instruction

Learning how to strengthen the delivery of your demands is helpful. Four power-adding techniques are contained in the following paragraph:

The teacher observed Subal pushing the children who were in front of him in the line. The teacher calmly stood in front of Subal, looked him right in the eye, placed his hand on his shoulder, gestured with his left hand, and said, " Subal, you are not permitted to push the other students."

Eye contact: Messages delivered without eye contact are messages delivered with half potency. Whenever possible, make eye contact with a student when instructing him.

Hand gestures: Hand gestures emphasize our words. Use them as such, as opposed to using them to intimidate a student.

Student's name: Using the student's name when instructing him fixes his attention on your words.

Touch: Physical touch indicates the sincerity and authority of your message. Use touch, however, with care. Especially avoid touching a student when angry or with the intention of hurting him. Don't touch older students of the opposite sex.

Eye contact, gestures, use of name, and touch are all useful in increasing the power of verbal communication. To experience this, try a brief role-play. Find a partner, begin by making a direct statement of instruction to that person. For the purpose of the demonstration, do not use any of the four elements. Especially make sure you do not give your partner direct eye contact. Then, beginning with eye contact, add in each of the four elements one by one.

Observe the increase of the strength of the communication.

Using consequences

When a teacher gives direct instructions, he must indicate that consequences will follow if his instructions are disobeyed or ignored.

Teachers do not generally enjoy having to use consequences even if they become expert at calmly promising that a consequence will follow non-compliance of an instruction. But seeing the need, a dutiful teacher uses consequences out of affection for his student. Consequences are useful for the improvement and rectification of the student; they are not a medium for the teacher to exact revenge.

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