

A Reflection on Children's Behaviour

Shipra Agarwal



I have been working as a teacher in the Azim Premji School in Dineshpur (Uttarakhand) since 2012 and talk about behaviour in the class on a regular basis. As of now I am the Class Teacher of Class-4. Five children in the class abuse the others and indulge in misbehavior of a similar kind, especially in the absence of the teacher and this leads to even physical fights because of which there are problems in the conduct of the class and disturbance in the class-room teaching. A lot of time is spent sometimes in resolving these issues.

Case Study

I thought of working with these five children whose behaviour and conversation had a high number of abuse-words. It is usually believed and said that

- Physical punishment is the easiest way to control children. But this would have had a negative effect on their studies as their attention would have been diverted to their physical hurt. I also felt that this would lead them to feel scared of me.
- Another thought was to make them leave the class. But then I realized this too would affect their studies and there was also the possibility that they would begin enjoying being out of class and the problem, instead of being controlled could have been aggravated.
- I then thought of calling their parents and talking to them. This would lead to a regular attendance of the students or they would at least continue to come to school without any fear. In the end I made up my mind to talk to the children separately after the class.

Work-Plan: In order to minimize the problem, I planned to talk to these five children after the class thinking that this would not affect their studies in any way.

Process: I started talking to them in generalities. I asked them about what they did in school. Each of them gave a different answer.

One of them said that they studied.

Another said that they played.

Yet another said they ate too.

I then asked them what they liked to do best in school. And they all replied in unison that they liked playing most of all.

I then asked them if anyone used abusive language with them. No sooner did I ask this than they began sharing their experiences.

One of them said that Priya uses words of abuse for him

The second said that many children called him by his distorted name.

In response to my query as to whether they too responded the same way, all of them said 'yes'. And when I asked them if they could remain silent and not answer back on such occasions, they again said 'yes'.

I said that we come to the school not just to study but also to learn how to behave well - and other such good things. I asked them - if we don't respond to the abusive language used by others, will there be less of quarrelling? All of them responded by saying 'yes'. No one likes to hear abuses hurled at him or her, and it is very difficult to remain silent at that point of time - will you be able to do so, I asked? All of them responded positively, and I said that we will see the next day how many children do not respond to such language used against them.

The next day, children shared their experiences. Someone said that I was called names but I remained silent and went home; another said, when I went out to play, I was faced with abusive language but I remained quiet. When I asked if any of them themselves used abusive language, they started blaming one another on this account, and I had to ask them to talk just about themselves and not about others, and they admitted that they did do so sometimes. I then asked them to take care and not use such language - and they promised to take care.

On November 5, 2016 the children came back to school after the Diwali holidays. Three of the five were present in the class. I talked to them separately.

I asked them how they had spent their holidays. I began my conversation thus so that they would feel comfortable. All shared their experiences and then we talked about the issue at hand. They all agreed that they do not use abusive language, nor did they respond to anyone who uses it. But when asked if they wait for their turn to speak in the class, they expressed their failure to do so – they do try but then they forget. I said that if they continuously keep this in mind, they will get used to doing so.

All of them said that they would try to do so. But no difference was to be seen as yet in their behaviour. With me they would talk with ease and in the proper manner but this was not to be seen in other situations. When, for instance, I went to Raj Kumar's place (name changed) during the community-visit, I did not like the tone in which I saw him speaking. I talked to these children about the manner in which one should speak and they all agreed about the tone in which one should speak to elders and fellow-students.

Change in behaviour is not easy and one has to be in continuous dialogue as well as create a suitable environment for it to happen. Providing the required environment may not be in our hands, for that will depend more on the community and the fellow-students but I do try my best through dialogue, as best as I can.

Thereafter, I could not talk to them as I got busy in the preparation of Report Cards. Their behaviour seemed to have reverted to what it was earlier and this got me thinking and I thought that whatever time I get, should be utilized in talking to them – even if that be during the lunch-break or some other time. I should not stop talking to them.

December 15, 2016 - I called Kamal, Raj Kumar, Vikas, Kavita and Prema (all imaginary names). Much of my time went in listening to them and this was the right thing to happen as the children were at least able to say what they wanted to say. But most of their talk was related to complaints about others and I also got to know that these were complaints to which they had already responded – for instance, such and such student said such and such thing to one, and so (s)he also said back something. I asked them to do just one thing – that instead of responding in kind, they should just note down the date when a certain thing happened. And whenever we converse, they should talk only about themselves, not others – they should be telling just about how they were able to behave with others. One can notice a change in their behaviour now but

this is visible till only the time one is in dialogue with them. Once the dialogue stops, they seem to revert to their earlier patterns of behaviour.

When there was sharing about behaviour with children in the meeting with fellow-teachers on 18th January 2017, I came to know that Raj Kumar (imaginary name) who would earlier hesitate even to read a single word in English, now asks for a book to read in English. No one knew how this change came about in him, but this was there for everyone to see. Another teacher told about Kavita (imaginary name) that she was earlier never willing to play but now herself comes to seek a leadership role and it was seen on the Sports Day that she led the Football team and brought victory to her team. There was a change in her way of speaking too.

It was only on January 23, 2017 that I could meet the children - after many days. First it was the winter vacation, then a break announced by the District Magistrate followed by a two days leave for personal reasons. I therefore planned to talk to the children - but could not do so because of being busy teaching in all periods and a duty to perform during the lunch-time.

I told my school-head about my problem and it was suggested that I could have lunch with the children. And so, the next day I talked to them over lunch. When I met the Head Teacher after that, he suggested that it would be better to talk to them informally as the children will talk unhesitatingly, without the hierarchy inherent in the teacher-student relationship. My experience, however, was different and I thought it would be better to sit separately and talk to them as I was more comfortable this way – though only the children could really tell in what way they felt comfortable.

The next day I tried to get to know the views of the children but just three of them were present and each of them had a different view with one wishing to talk during lunch, the second wanting to talk at the place we used to sit earlier and the third saying we could sit anywhere.

I preferred to talk to them sitting separately as there would be no disturbance. Outside, there would always be diversions and I would have to bring them back to attentiveness. But still we sat outside, which did not turn out to be a very good experience as there were repeated disturbances and breaks in the links of conversation. And so, the next day, we sat in a separate room. Four of the concerned five students were present. They were,

however, unable to concentrate even here and I had to request them to be attentive.

On February 4, 2017 I talked to them again. And they told me that they were not comfortable talking in front of all others and would prefer a separate space for interaction. Tushar reported that Narayan of Class-5 was addressing him with a distorted form of his name in the Assembly and he did not respond to that. I told him that he did the right thing and also asked him to tell this to the Class Teacher who would talk to Narayan. I reminded him that his

quarrel with Krishna of Class-4 took a worse form because he had responded to her and both had beaten each other because of which she was hurt in the foot. After a bit of talking thus, all went back to their classes.

Conclusion – Till the end of the session I thus continuously worked on the behaviour of these children and one could notice a change in behaviour many times. And yet there is a need to work more with them on this.

Shipra currently teaches at Azim Premji School, Dineshpur, Udhamsingh Nagar. She has been working in the field of education since 1997. She may be contacted at shipra.agarwal@azimpremjifoundation.org