

## BREAKING LEARNER'S ISOLATION AND TEACHER'S INSULATIONS: A STRATEGY FOR EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

*This paper is about improving effectiveness of the classroom beyond the normal efforts of content, methods and methodology. It is about missing communication between teacher and learner/s. this break of communication is by virtue of two major factors- Learner's isolation and teacher's insulation. Here isolation of learner is taken other than resulted from any form of disability. Isolation if ignore till extreme can turn in to depression (self –destructive) or aggression (else-destructive). Author discusses three layers of communication in the class on the Pask's theory of conversation- general language, subject language and Metalanguage. It is the first layer where isolation starts. Author suggests three sets of measures namely- Justice Delivery, Social Network and Compensation to break isolation of learner in the class. Then author focuses on teacher's own insulations in the classroom. These can be deliberate as unconscious. Insulations decreases popularity of the teacher and sense of belongingness to the class. Author suggests three sets of measures- Cognitive, Affective and Conative for breaking insulations of the teacher. In the end two factors are combined to interact resulting in four possible classrooms named as- Worst Classroom, Diplomatic Classroom, and Ordinary Classroom and Best Classroom. The Best Classroom is a classroom where learners have no isolations and teacher has no insulations. This is the both efficient and effective classroom.*

**Key words:**Learner's Isolation, Teacher's Insulation, Effective classroom, Efficient classroom, Best classroom

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Classroom is a place where two-way communication flow is essential for learning to proceed. According to Conversation theory proposed by Andrew Gordon SpeediePask(1928–1996) learning process has to pass through three levels of language used for interaction in the classroom. First level of language is general communication which is essential for making rapport with the learner. It involves general sharing of concerns and deciding targets to be achieved and a personal kind of communication and guidance. It may be attribute to the relation building layer of communication. It forms the base layer of communication as you can't transfer knowledge without building relation with the learner. Actually, relation building helps in building faith, building confidence, achieving a secured environment and coming to the level of the child so that knowledge transfer becomes easier. Second layer of communication is the subject language which is specific to the contents. This is actual teaching involving specific terms, symbols, forms and structures as per the designed curriculum. It has limited scope and intention, but is important as it is to be evaluated for attainment. Third layer of communication in the learning process is meta-language which is thinking about thinking of subject matter. It is actually epistemology of the subject which involves methodology of viewing nature, context and transfer of subject matter rather than content and stereotype methods.

Lacking of any of these three layers of communication the learning process remains discontinuous and incomplete. In a class or school we have all sorts of students ranging from excellent to poor ones as also expected on the basis of statistical conclusions for normal probability curve. This can be attributed to both abilities distribution as well as chance factors of environment including operational methods of a teacher. But beyond this we observe some deviations among learners in a classroom. Leaving aside learners suffering from some sort of disability, there are learners who are otherwise normal, are found to remain isolated in classroom/s. This isolation of learner/s is very harmful for both learner as well as society. Besides this there is another usually ignored aspect of classroom communication is teacher's insulations from learners. These insulations may take many forms and can be deliberate or lack of awareness on the part of teacher, but definitely have devastating effect on progress of learning and learners under his/her charge. This paper is an attempt to explore both isolations as well as insulations in the context of classroom teaching.

Isolation in a classroom amounts to a situation when a learner (not suffering from any form of disability including ADHD, Learning disability, Autism etc.) remains disconnected from his

teacher as well as peers and don't participate in academic, co-curricular and other group activities. Isolation in classroom starts with lack of first layer of communication and aggravates with the involvement of second and third layer language operations. At the same time isolation can also increase with insulations of deliberately erected by the teacher. Isolation if ignored can lead to either depression (acting in) or aggression (acting out). In case of depression, it further deepens and severely affects physical and mental health of the learner, which defeats the very purpose of existence of a school. Schools are invented exactly for opposite reason i.e. to help in improving physical and mental health of the learner. In case isolation results in aggression the learner will become noisy and destructive in nature. There is every chance s/he may work against the interests of school his/her, well-wishers and the society at large. All negative social groups are resultant of such ignored events in the life of the child. Aggression later on becomes an instrument to establish identity for negative reasons. Isolation is a vicious cycle in which learner gets caught and due to immaturity unable to break the cycle. The cycle starts with unknown source but becomes visible first to the parents and teacher. Parents usually being ignorant or lacking experience in handling young children miss the symptoms in the children. On the other hand teachers are witness to number of such cases and behaviors in their previous sessions, thus are expected to act. If ignored, this vicious cycle becomes operational and the reason for such behavior becomes stronger and stronger in frequency and intensity. Teacher is a trained person to handle learning as well as learner; s/he has a pious duty to save the child from being slipped in to the darkness of isolation.

#### **How teacher can break isolation:**

According to Kounin (1970), effective classroom managers are aware of student behaviors and activities at all times in order to prevent small issues from escalating, a trait he termed "withitness". Withitness is a sense of being along with the events happening in the classroom. It could be a sort of witness to both academic as well as behavioral events happening in the classroom. There could be three situations with regard to isolation in a classroom- no isolation, (means teacher needs to maintain the status), no clear cut idea of isolation (means teacher be vigilant if any) and definite isolation (means teacher needs to take corrective measures). Consequently teacher should undertake three forms of initiatives for breaking these isolations- Justice Delivery (preventive measures), Social Network (Symbiotic measures) and

Compensation (Reversal measures). These three measures are employed at the level of behavior, procedures and evaluation in the classroom.

### **Justice delivery:**

All human beings are justice loving from their origin and justice is expected from a person who is in charge of the affairs. In a classroom situation teacher is in charge of every action taking place. A teacher has prime to do justice with learners and with his duties towards learners. In this regard following actions are suggested.

- Teacher should be affectionate to every learner in the class as it is his/her first duty to build a faith among the learners. Faith in the leader is first requirement for expecting unbiased decisions and impartial attitudes.
- Consistent behavior of teacher is one of the best methods to avoid biasness in dealing with learners. When I say consistency in teacher's behavior it means there must be some clear cut norms for conduct of the classroom. Learners must be very clear what form of behavior will be appreciated and what will invite punishment, what will appease the teacher and what will annoy him/her and the like. Evertson et al (1988) while elaborating COMP (Classroom Organization and Management Program) considered planning and teaching rules and procedures as one of the seven components of the model.
- Teacher needs to do justice while distributing role assignments (as per interest and ability of the learner) for various classroom and school level activities. Justice is also expected while evaluating the learners on different academic and co-curricular activities.
- Provide a secure environment and show belongingness so that children can even discuss their confidential problems for seeking a solution.
- Strategies like- equity not equality only, reach till the end, individualized instruction, right peg in the right cone can help the teacher in delivering the justice.

### **Social network:**

Social relations are the most effective instruments for handling our issues irrespective of our age. In schools while passing through adolescence they face number of problems. This may be the start of isolation, which could easily be taken care off by with availability of social network. Following measure are suggested for teacher to build social networks.

- Teacher need to be accessible to learners physically as well as on other communication channels like suggestion/complaint box, e-mail, groups and forums on social media, and phone off course. The learner must be welcomed for discussion on relevant issues in groups as well as on personal basis.
- S/he needs to establish a free and fair communication network with parents and guardians, for knowing and informing about every aspect of the child's school life.
- Freedom of expression must be ensured in classroom and during indoor & outdoor activities, it helps in opening of the learner for discussion.
- Learner-learner interactions should also be encouraged by virtue of group activities like quiz, project work, panel discussion, assignments and the like.
- Teacher should demonstrate his ability to collaborate and cooperate with other teachers, which has potential to influence learners for doing the same in their group. As Fullan(1993) declared, *"You cannot have students as continuous learner and effective collaborators, without teachers have the same characteristics"*.
- Teacher should participate in activities like PTA meetings, SMC (School management committee) meetings, PRC (Public relation committee) etc. which demonstrate his/her ability to collaborate and making social networks.
- Strategies like- good social behavior game, who knows maximum names, call by name etc. can help in building social networks.

### Compensation:

Compensation is an instrument of repairing the damage, i.e. efforts to bring back the isolated child in to mainstream. In absence of any compensation measure learner may further slip in to the darkness of isolation and finally resulting is a deviant human being. Teacher can try the below given suggestions to break the isolation by virtue of compensation.

- Academic lag is one of the biggest reasons for isolation in classroom; teacher must help the learners by devising individualized instruction as per their need. Once the child improves on academics, there is every possibility that there will be no more isolation.
- Give every child a chance to succeed, in one way or other. Every child can't prove his worth in terms of academics; there are so many talents to do it. For this reason teacher must use variety of methods and strategies for teaching as well as evaluation. There need

variety of classroom activities which help bringing out hidden talent in the learners.

- Disability might be another reason for isolation of a learner. Sometime disability for instance learning disability is discovered in the classroom only, but for this teacher needs to be vigilant and be well aware of major disabilities and their signs. Once doubted parents and authorities must be informed at the earliest for initiating the rehabilitation task.
- Teacher must offer referral and counseling service relating issues of isolation to both learners and their parents. S/he can really develop insight in this regard on the basis of previous such experiences which worked to break isolation.
- Strategies like grouping, behavior modeling, ideals presentation, community participation and cooperative learning can definitely help in breaking isolation by virtue of compensation.

#### **Teacher's Insulations:**

Teacher's insulations are the other significant issue which adversely affects classroom teaching. Many teachers are of the opinion that a teacher should maintain a difference from learners and their parents for preserving their dignity and authority. This line of thinking is not going to work in the present scenario of knowledge revolution which necessitates utmost sharing. Teacher's insulations may be conscious as well as unconscious. The conscious insulations may include- Qualification, Language preference, Personal identity, Beliefs, Values, ego and the like. The unconscious insulations may include- Genetic dispositions, Aptitude, Teaching Style, lack of Subjects Mastery and Teaching Methodology and the like. If a teacher prefers to maintain his/her insulations s/he loses belongingness to the class, becomes unpopular among the learners and academic results are bound to fall. Thus to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom a teacher needs to break these insulations using systematic and conscious efforts. These insulations can be broken by measure to be taken under three well known domains- Cognitive, Affective and Conative.

#### **Cognitive Measures:**

Cognitive domain is about efforts in terms of intellect and intellectual activities. In a classroom it would be concerning delivery of the subject matter. There are many issues relating to cognitive

domain of learning which needs to be addressed by the teacher. This does never mean that very child should score equal to most brilliant child in the class, rather it calls for deserved attention for every child. Teacher is advised to take following cognitive actions for breaking his insulations.

- Teacher must use simple terms, symbols, vocabulary, forms and structures to deliver the subject matter. It will help learners digest the contents and keep pace with classroom proceedings.
- The language used in the class for transaction of subject matter as well as general communication should be learners' preference rather than teacher's. In case country like India where so much language variations are there, general discussions may be conducted in mother tongue and academic work should be done in accepted medium of instruction. However in case of problem teacher should translate the same for learners.
- The readability index of the language used must be age appropriate so that transaction must be complete. High readability index obstructs the learning hugely. A teacher needs to take special care in this regard.
- Teacher must theorize teaching from his/her own perspective and context. A systematic collection and analysis of previous experiences can help him/her in this proposition. Utilizing these one can come to conclusion how learners learn best.
- Success is a must fuel to run the engine of progress for human being. Teacher needs to prepare plan for success of every. Although it will be difficult to prepare plan on individual basis in bigger classes, but then it could be replaced by same ability/problem groups.
- Tutorial sessions could be another good measure to break the insulation in academic domain. Tutoring is both one to one learning as well as problem solving related to individual's learning.
- Teacher should employ some strategies like I help you (nurturing), I take you along (leading from front), I do first (demonstration), I value you and your ideas (Prompting) and the like.

### **Affective Measures:**

Psychologist feel affective domain plays big role in determine our actions and decision making.

It is about involvement our emotions, sentiments, attitudes, beliefs etc. But most of the psychological entities are greatly influenced by environment, thus we can manage these. Teacher could do the same by undertaking following activities.

- Teacher should set a culture of sharing for both successes as well as failures. Successes should be celebrated and failures need to be analyzed for flaws which caused them. For this s/he could be the trend setter.
- Teacher needs to show concern in every matter related to his/her students; this would help in breaking psychological barriers between the two.
- In the time of adversity (sickness, failure, a mishap in the family etc.) teacher should keep contact with the learner for moral support. This small gesture can go a long way for breaking insulations between the two.
- Wishing a birthday or saying good luck for exams, or wishing enjoyable holidays to the learner would be great tip for breaking insulation using affective domain. What may be a small effort from teacher can be an unforgettable moment for the learner.
- Ensuring full support to learners for implementing an innovative idea in academic as well as co-curricular activities can be another way to mix with the child. Sometimes such initiative can backfire, but even then teacher should support the learner so that the process of innovation culture should not stop altogether.
- Supporting the learners for their genuine demands during staff discussions could be a wonderful gesture for demonstration of concern. Sometime it may bring trouble for the teacher but then it will demonstrate his/her ability to break these insulations.
- Helping the learners in need without any expectation in return would be the best gesture for breaking insulations. Learner's needs are usually small ones like-issue of a book from library, helping on a project, counseling on a personal problem, which a teacher always can fulfill. This will ensure elimination of insulations if any.
- Deliberately losing authority and behaving like a friend on an educational tour, during sports day or on occasion of farewell party of students could be of great moment for breaking teacher's insulations.
- Techniques like- submission for criticism, classroom confession, catharsis, open for evaluation, acceptance to change etc., adopted by teacher can work very well for breaking insulations.



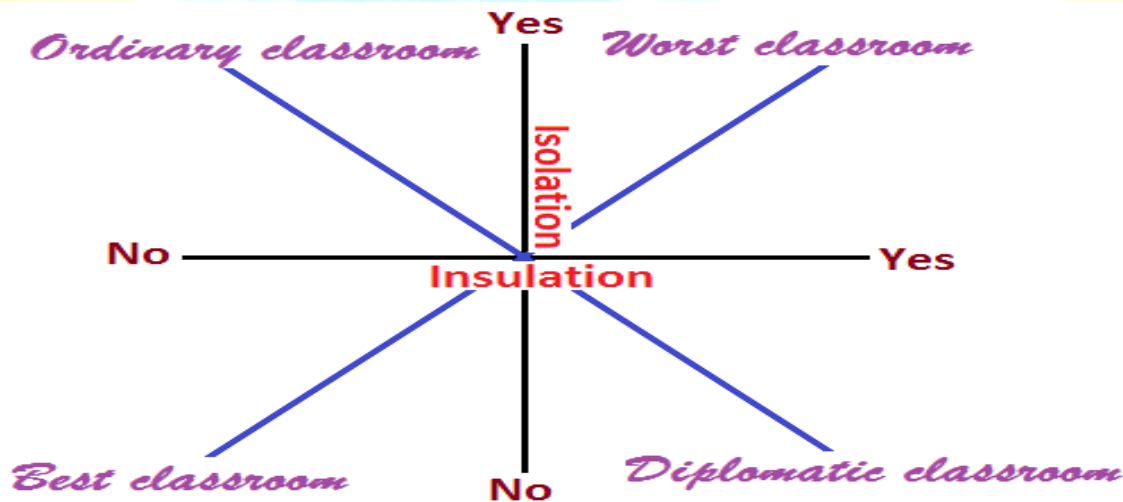
### Conative Measures

This is action oriented domain which may also be thought in terms of decision teacher makes in connection of learning and learner. Actions of the teacher should be such that learners should get impression of their existence in those actions. Following are some actions which teacher may try to break the insulations which he has consciously or unconsciously.

- Teacher should impress the learners with his/her words as well as actions. His/her every action should show his/her genuine concern for the learners. Accommodating a late comer, including a disabled child in a co-curricular program, individual evaluation to correct mistakes of the learner are some examples of affirmative actions expected from a teacher.
- His/her all decisions should work in favor of learners, which will help him/her to win hearts of the learners. Once learners feel s/he is his/her teacher insulations are bound to dissolve.
- Changing his strategies, method, style and devices of teaching to suit the learners would be an action that brings the learners more close to the teacher.
- Attending social functions, reporting parents on their wards progress, popularizing and taking pride in learner's achievements are some of the actions that break the insulations of the teacher.
- Saying yes to play or accompanying a recreational trip, changing own program in favor of students demand are some actions which would impress the learners.
- Coaching on social skills along with teaching on regular basis would help a lot to break isolation in the classroom as well as teacher's insulations. Social skills may include tolerance, group activities, cooperation, taking responsibility, appreciation, communication and criticism etc.
- For maintaining discipline-class timeout, out-of-class timeout, sending to school principal, suspension and exclusion are some of the techniques which cause isolation of the learners from their peers as well as teacher. This definitely has negative impact on learner's mental makeup, thus teacher should use these very cautiously and judiciously.
- Strategies like- facilitating learning, teaming up for learning and action for learning, help ever no never and the like can be useful for to justify teacher's actions for breaking insulations.

### Combined effect of Isolation and insulations

In a classroom there can be four situations depending on existence or non-existence of students' isolation and teacher's insulations as shown in the figure. These four options could be 'Worst Classroom' when there is existence of both isolation as well as insulations, 'Diplomatic Classroom' where insulations exist but isolations do not, 'Ordinary Classroom' in which there are no insulations but still isolations exist and 'Best Classroom' where there is no place for existence of learners' isolations as well as teacher's insulations. Diplomatic classroom seems to be a hypothetical one, reason being when teacher maintains insulations one or other learner is bound to get isolated. In ordinary classes teachers are usually concerned only about finishing syllabi and fulfilling the duties as per the norms and conduct mentioned in their appointment letter. They are neither trained nor aware about the isolations taking place in his/her classroom.



**Figure 1: Isolation-Insulations Interaction**

S/he knows methods to teach but lacks methodology to understand the child. His/her content is subjects matter, whereas his/her subjects are not connected to him/her. Fourth category i.e. 'Best Classroom' for which we are aspiring or dream to have in every school. In such a classroom teacher is fully aware of possibilities of his own insulations as well as learner's isolations. S/he keeps watching his own character and his learners' behavior in the classroom. A teacher needs to understand both his subject and his/her subjects. This needs both best of training and best of observations as well. For conscious insulations s/he needs to introspect and shun these in favor of learners' progress. Whereas unconscious insulations are like 'blind personality' where others can

see our weaknesses but we are unaware, thus only others can help in eliminating these weaknesses. Teacher should gain a systematic feedback for his/her own behavior and conduct. A faithful friend, a reliable senior or principal and pass out students can be very helpful in this concern. Comparing effectiveness of one's own classes with colleagues' can also help the teacher to point out the insulations s/he is carrying in the classroom.

### Conclusions:

- Teaching is not only about delivering the subject matter as per the design of curriculum.
- There are students who go out of the mainstream of classroom for some unknown reasons.
- Teacher can be one of the reasons for isolation of a learner in the classroom. This can easily be ascertained by evaluating his/her isolation in other classes or in other situations including at home.
- Teacher can be best counselor to a learner for breaking this isolation.
- There is possibility of some insulations from teacher's side which disconnects him/her from learners.
- It is unfortunate if these insulations are a deliberate attempt of the teacher. If reported by the learners, school authority s/he should take appropriate corrective measure.
- Unconscious insulations can be characteristics attributed to teachers' methodology and personality orientation.
- These insulations can definitely be taken care of with systematic feedback and SOS (Share, Own and Solve the problems/insulations) strategy.
- If both isolations and insulations can be negated from a classroom, the entrepreneur of learning would be most enjoyable and success of every child would be inevitable. This would be both efficient and effective classroom we are looking for.

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