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### Managing the College Classroom: Perspectives from an Introvert and an Extrovert

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#### Abstract

One of the biggest challenges facing college instructors in the 21st century is classroom misbehavior. The authors propose that how one handles classroom incivility is a matter of personality type. One of the authors is an extrovert; the other an introvert. The authors discuss personality theory, general classroom management, how to identify student problems, ascertain the cause of student problems and provide an appropriate solution depending upon one's personality type. With the right goals, preparation and strategies all types of professors can effectively deal with disruptive students.

#### Introduction

One of the challenges facing instructors in the 21st century is classroom behavior leading to disciplinary action. This issue can be a day to day problem for some professors. Bartlett (2004) reports that incivility in today's academic culture is not the exception, but rather the norm.

Through informal hallway conversations we became interested in different methods of dealing with incivility. One of us is an extrovert; the other an introvert. We profess that no matter the personality type, a classroom instructor can manage incivility in the classroom.

One of the most common areas in which we see classroom disruption is due to technology. Technology has provided both faculty and students with tools to enhance the pedagogical environment, but it can also be a distracting, if not disrupting, force in the classroom. Some students use computers to peruse the internet on non-curriculum subjects, and to send instant messages. Others are distracted by PDAs, but Gilroy (2004) notes that cell phone usage is the most unsettling occurrence in the classroom. These distractions can result in faculty-student disconnection, and we believe that connecting with students is a primary component to classroom management.

Parker Palmer (1998) notes that no matter how much experience one has, techniques, though sometimes useful, are not the element that assists faculty with connecting to their students, rather, it is knowing and trusting oneself. Query students about their favorite instructors, and why they chose them, and a wide variety of answers will be produced. The common trait among students' favorite professors is a strong sense of self. Palmer states that it is important "to understand my own nature as a teacher and to learn the techniques that might help it along" (p. 24). Sperber (2005) concurs

with Palmer noting that one should teach according to one's personality, not the trend of the day, mentors, or anyone else. He also notes that "students possess superb radar that quickly locates phoniness in professors" (p. B20).

We found no literature that matched personality type to classroom management strategies. We were curious if there exists a technique(s) that would be a success or failure based upon specific personality type

### Personality Type

Many personality theorists focus upon Jungian (1921) trait personality theory because it is the theory with which faculty, regardless of discipline, have the most familiarity. Trait personality theory posits that our personality traits are inherent and while no one is a pure personality type, we tend to use one type more naturally and more frequently. According to the Myers-Briggs (1998) Typology Indicator, based upon Jungian trait theory, there are sixteen different personality types. These sixteen different personality types are based upon combinations of four dimensions:

1. Introversion/Extroversion - describes how one gets energized.
2. Sensing/Intuiting - describes how a person takes in information.
3. Thinking/feeling - describes how a person makes decisions.
4. Judging/Perceiving - describes a person's preferred lifestyle and work habits.

Our difference is on the Introversion/Extroversion scale; the other dimensions are the same. We feel that this is theoretically significant because it is the dimension most likely to affect how professors verbally and nonverbally interact with students. This is certainly true in our case as we deal with classroom incivility with different strategies, yet both of us are successful with this sometimes unpleasant task.

### Introverted vs. Extroverted Professor in the Classroom

We characterize introverts as relating well to quieter students, as they were probably in that category themselves, and as endeavoring to involve those students in classroom discussion. The introverted professor is more likely to assign writing tasks as this allows the introverted students a medium to express ideas and emotions in a non-spoken fashion. The introverted professor is a good listener and proficient at reading nonverbal signals. This professor is patient and allows students time to formulate thoughts and answers. Finally the introverted professor does not gravitate toward students who speak spontaneously or monopolize class discussion.

The extroverted professor tends to gravitate toward talkative students and may challenge them to go further with their thinking and to verbalize thoughts. This professor is also more likely to take chances and try new strategies in the classroom. Talking is encouraged, even if the topic veers and goes off on tangents. Usually this professor displays high energy and probably is annoyed by or

ignores students who seldom or never speak in class.

### **Specifics on College Classroom Management**

Regardless of personality type, the following Top Ten Tips are suggested for preventing classroom discipline problems:

1. Know thyself, love thyself. Confidence is essential to create the proper environment.
2. Utilize all your strengths. Under this category is preparation. Students are well aware of the unprepared professor. This causes a loss of respect, but also can lead to disruptive behavior. Additionally, use available tools, DVD, PowerPoint, and other media; today's students are not wired for a 75 minute lecture.
3. If you are aware of weaknesses, devise goals and then seek assistance/training to improve.
4. It is imperative to determine students' learning styles and to develop strategies to meet all students' needs. When students are engaged in the classroom discipline issues should be minimized.
5. Consider overall class personality. We believe this is especially true of learning communities (two or more linked classes). The strength of learning communities is that students get to know one another and feel more comfortable, both in and out of the classroom. A weakness of this comfort-level is the tendency to chat with classmates during class. Jaffee (2004) notes that this comfort-factor can lead to learning community students being seen as immature, rude, and too talkative.
6. Spend time with students out of class. A ten to 15 minute one-on-one can make students and professors more comfortable with one another and allows each to discuss classroom behaviors
7. Earn students' respect. This is not the same as "being liked." Many beginning, but even experienced, professors put too much importance on popularity. Being prepared, being fair, honest, and having a passion for the material and teaching are respected by students.
8. Directly communicate to students that you care about their success, both in and out of the classroom.
9. Announce guidelines concerning acceptable and unacceptable classroom behavior. Clearly state the consequences for disruptions, including campus judicial policies; consistency is essential.
10. Consider having students directly involved in classroom behavior plans. Professors may have students set classroom conduct guidelines on the first day of class. This causes students to feel as if it also their class or, some professors have success having students sign code of conduct guideline contracts (Bartlett, 2004). These strategies are especially helpful with students considered to be part of the Millennial Generation, those born after 1982. This generation enjoys group activity, is close to their parents, are high achievers, has been sheltered, respects tradition and convention, and is comfortable with technology (McGlynn, 2005).

Despite faculty's best efforts to create a positive pedagogical environment, discipline issues will still occasionally occur. Our recommendation is to have a three step response: 1) identify the problem, 2) ascertain a cause and 3) devise solutions.

### **Identifying the problem**

Individual student problems/issues emerge due to a variety of reasons. The college environment is much different from its high school counterpart and some students actually resist learning. Students may also blurt out inappropriate statements that are disruptive. We have categorized inappropriate behavior into six categories:

1. The unattached student is disengaged from the classroom environment.
2. The disinterested student is bored.
3. The contemptuous student verbally and/or nonverbally communicates disrespect for the professor, and/or other students, and/or the course content.
4. The disruptive student may be chatting with classmates, have a noisy electronic device, be reading non-classroom material, or blatantly sleeping.
5. The insubordinate student may challenge the professor's authority, challenge assignments, or be aggressive with other students.
6. The distressed student may have behavioral difficulties based upon neurological and/or physical maladies.

If not addressed properly these behaviors can not only seriously affect pedagogy, but may also lead to other problems such as:

1. Others are encouraged to join the inappropriate behavior.
2. The professor becomes exasperated and loses focus.
3. Instructor competence may be questioned by the students.
4. The learning of other students is negatively affected.
5. Students may feel that the class is a waste of time, become unattached or drop the class.
6. General misery for all ensues.

Professors need to directly face these problems. Faculty are the metaphorical "front-line" of college discipline, but faculty emotions may be affected by student behavior.

Some thoughts/feeling professors should confront/consider:

1. I am a college professor; I should not have to deal with discipline. However, we do have to address these problems.
2. Discipline is awkward and distasteful, but problems are likely to persist and not disappear.
3. Discipline is subjective.
4. Faculty often assume many roles with students, such as mentor, counselor, etc., and finding a good balance may be difficult (Smalley, 2004).

### Ascertain the Problem's Cause

1. Based upon high school experiences, some students may not be aware of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
2. Some students may not believe bad behavior is a problem.
3. Some students just do not care, and either do not want to be enrolled in a particular class or even be in college.
4. Some students may need or want attention.
5. Life distractions can cause problems.
6. Students may be uncertain of behavioral expectations.
7. Particular students may fear failure, rejection, looking foolish, or being rejected.
8. Grading issues can create problems.
9. Students mature at different paces. Student-development theorist Arthur Chickering (1978) notes that students are working on the following seven vectors of development in his psycho-social model:
  - a. Developing autonomy
  - b. Achieving competence
  - c. Managing emotions
  - d. Becoming autonomous
  - e. Establishing identity
  - f. Developing freedom from personal relationships
  - g. Clarifying purposes and developing integrity

With such a multitude of overlapping personal issues, students face many challenges of maturity that can affect the problem's cause. Nevertheless, solutions are available.

### Devising Solutions

College classrooms have a plethora of variables - course content, professor personality, professor's teaching style, students' personalities, and group dynamics. When all coalesces, pedagogy is enhanced and disruptive behavior is diminished. There is no exact formula, but pedagogy and personality are inseparable.

McKeachie (2002) addresses "problem students," their behaviors, and strategies for those situations. Tips include:

1. Do not intentionally avoid controversy.
2. Listen, and teach students to do the same.
3. Stay in control; immediate response is not always required.
4. Talk to colleagues about their successes and failures.
5. Remember that problem students are human beings with needs; professors may be able to help.

While introverted and extroverted professors sometimes employ the same strategies, they more often handle disruptive behaviors in different fashions.

### Applying McKeachie's (2002) tips: The Introverted Professor

1. The introverted professor does not have to avoid controversy,

- but the situation might best be handled in private one-one-one meetings. If disruptive behavior does occur in the classroom, the introverted professor can enlist other students for their reaction to the behavior.
2. If a one-on-one does occur, the introverted professor's superior listening skills can aid in getting to the core of issues. Ask the disruptive student why the incivility is happening. If necessary, give the student a warning, and explain campus judicial policy.
  3. The professor keeping her/his emotions under control is paramount for credibility; rushing to a decision or action may be destructive. The introverted professor may want to have students write down their feelings on disruptive behavior, compile the data, then share the findings with the entire class.
  4. Conversing with trusted and respected colleagues can illuminate their successes and failures. The introverted professor, usually more cautious than the extroverted type, may need to try new strategies if previous successes become failures.
  5. Problem students may require more patience and time than other students. Having clear behavioral guidelines and implications in the syllabus gives the professor power to enforce classroom rules. If disruptive students feed off one another, dividing the disruptors and putting the class into small groups with tasks may accomplish a solution. Additionally, problem students may be advised and directed to see a school counselor.

Other strategies that have worked for the introverted professor in this article are:

1. To respect, never disparage, any student.
2. Never discuss a student's grades during class.
3. If a student wants to discuss a grade, require a 24 hour waiting period.
4. Do not enable latecomers, begin and end class on time.
5. Ignore small behavior problems.
6. Make prolonged eye-contact and/or walk toward the disruptive student.
7. Give the disruptive students the benefit of the doubt and ask for their contributions.
8. Ask students in the disruptive student's proximity for their verbal feedback during class.
9. Tell the students you consider them adults, and therefore expect them to behave as adults.

#### Applying McKeachie's (2002) Teaching Tips: The Extroverted Professor

1. Immediately verbally address the disruptive behavior in front of the class (unless it is very minor and limited). Not addressing the behavior encourages more disruption, causes a loss of respect for the professor and cheapens the learning experience for students who care about education.
2. The extroverted professor may be less likely to listen carefully.

However, listening to students and directing them to listen to other students fosters a pleasant atmosphere. Never allow students to chat to other students when a classmate is speaking.

3. The extroverted professor may tend to act too quickly; think before acting or speaking, and needs to keep the temper/passion under control.
4. Even the most experienced professor can learn new strategies. Discussing other professor's experiences is a tool to be utilized.
5. The extroverted professor can use a dynamic personality to show he/she cares about students, even problem students. If direct verbal discipline does not succeed in the classroom, have a one-on-one with the disruptive student.

Other Strategies that have worked well for the extroverted professor in this article:

1. Use a well-developed sense of humor.
2. Keep the course quickly paced.
3. Always remain in control of the class.
4. Never ask a student "why are you doing that." A disparaging, degrading, or dismissive remark may ensue.
5. Use the outgoing personality to explain passion for both students and course material.
6. Always treat students, even disruptive students, with respect; never humiliate students.
7. Never argue examination questions or grades. Explain the rationale, but remain in control of the situation.
8. Have fun!

## Conclusion

Each professor and student brings different expectations, experiences, goals, attitudes, and personalities to the classroom. Professors, regardless of their personality type, need to keep the classroom dynamics in focus each day. All professors, introverts and extroverts, can have a positive classroom environment with proper goals, preparation and strategies to deal with disruptive students.

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