Islamic Foundations of Classroom Management
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QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE

> Allah subhaana wa ta'ala says in the Qur'an, "I have only created jinns
> and men, that they may worship Me" (Surah Al Dhariyat 51:56).

It is these clear words that grant us the purpose and direction in this dunya. They show us not only what life is about, but also how to live it. By making these words the foundation in a school, a system for classroom management easily emerges.

When we look around in the world at all the different creations of Allah subhaana wa ta'ala, we find that everything is in submission to Him. The Qur'an states, "Do they not look at Allah's creation, even among inanimate things – how their shadows turn round, from the right and the left, prostrating themselves to Allah, and that in the humblest manner? And to Allah does obey all that is in the heavens and on earth, whether moving (living) creatures or the angels – for none are arrogant before their Lord. They all revere their Lord, high above them, and they do all that they are commanded" (Surah Al Nahl 16:48-50). This means everything animate or inanimate is in submission to Him. So what about us? Are we as human beings submitting to Allah subhaana wa ta'ala? Are we obeying His every command?

The Qur'an also tells us, "And, the thunder makes tasbih and praises Him and so do the angels because of His awe" (Surah Ar-Rad 13:13). Another verse which is even more comprehensive states, "The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein, make tasbih to Him, and there is not a thing but glorifies His Praise. But you understand not their glorification…" (Surah Al-Isra 17:44). Therefore, everything, from the creation on earth to the stars in the sky and even thunder and lightening is constantly in remembrance of Him. And, once again, we must ask ourselves – what about us? Are we always remembering Allah subhaana wa ta'ala with our words, actions, and thoughts?

When the students are engaged in such a discourse during the first week of the school year, they are helping to build their awareness of Allah subhaana wa ta'ala in their everyday lives. They are beginning to realize and reflect on, from a young age, what it means to be an 'abd of Allah subhaana wa ta'ala. They are becoming more conscientious of Him. And, as Muslim educators, this is what we ultimately want for ourselves and our students – to strive to live up to the honor of being an 'abd.

Whether it is children or adults, it becomes very difficult to sustain any sort of discipline policy if it is only based on punishment or referred to as "school rules". However, if it is attached to a deeper and higher understanding and related to our relationship with Allah subhaana wa ta'ala, then it becomes easier to abide by it. Through this, they also begin to learn the concept of beautiful akhlaaq and adab by knowing that a certain word or action is or is not pleasing to Him. What naturally results from the above is a discussion on how

to submit to and be in remembrance of Allah subhaana wa ta'ala not only as students, but also as 'ibaad of Allah. Through this process of reflection and discourse, a classroom management policy can be derived.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PLAN

In designing a classroom management plan, it is important to know the goal. Is it to keep the classroom quiet and let the students know who is boss? Or is it to promote a healthy and safe learning environment where students can gain knowledge and receive tarbiyyah training, which will help them become responsible servants of Allah subhaana wa ta'ala? The answer is obvious. However, many times, we as teachers and administrators can fall into a rut when certain techniques stop working or when we come across a really difficult student. And, before we know it, our goal becomes the former rather than the latter. This is closely tied into defining our roles as teachers. Do I want to be a facilitator of knowledge and learning? Or do I want to be a lecturer with tight control of the classroom? Or do I want to be the students' best friend by the end of the year? Realizing the right role will help to fulfill the goal of management.

Studies show that as much as 50% of class time is lost due to misbehavior. That means that out of a 60-minute period, only 30 minutes are used for teaching. In other words, out of a 10-month school year, only 5 months are spent teaching. Even before resorting to a management plan, there is one way to prevent much of the misbehavior that happens – *planning*. In fact, it is all about planning, planning, and more planning! That includes planning for lessons, rules, and procedures. A well-planned lesson backed up by well-planned rules and procedures will reduce misbehavior drastically, engage students in on-task behavior, and promote learning insha'Allah. Much of the misbehavior takes place when the lesson is poorly planned, rules are not clearly explained, and procedures (especially during transitions) have not been clearly stated. When a lesson does not allow for much "down time", students end up staying on-task. If the rules are made clear, it reduces the chances of them being violated. (See the section on Rules below). Finally, procedures help to reduce confusion and chaos, which often leads to misbehavior. Here is a listing of some procedures that should be decided upon by the teacher ahead of time and clearly explained to the students:
- which materials to bring – paper, binder, pencil, etc.
- how to organize materials from different classes
- proper heading on assignments – name, date, page numbers, etc.
- what must be done to complete an assignment
- turning in late work
- when to sharpen pencils, get a drink, go to the bathroom, etc.
- how to clean up after an activity
- how to prepare for salaah
- how to go from the classroom to lunch, assembly, etc.
- how the class is dismissed

Careful planning ahead of time helps to reduce misbehavior.

There are a number of management plans that have been designed based on different theories and practices. Whether one employs Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline, Fred Jones' Positive Discipline, Glasser's Model or any of the others, it becomes a matter of what works with and enhances one's teaching style. There are certain elements to keep in mind, which have shown to be effective in managing a classroom environment. First, it is important to remember that the methods used are to help rectify and improve a child's behavior. It is not about punishing or humiliating a child. Secondly, there has to be recognition and sometimes rewarding of the right behavior. By doing so, it sets the standard for the students and lets them know in a positive and practical way what the expectations are. Finally, there have to be rules, consequences, and incentives. These can be supplemented with a "Hadith Wall", which can be designed in the following way:

Hadith Wall
This is a collection of ahadith that teach us proper akhlaaq and adab, each written on large sheets of paper, surrounding the posting of rules in the classroom. When any rule is broken, the teacher can ask the student if the behavior was in compliance with what a particular hadith would ask us to do. A few examples of hadith that can be included are:
- None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. (Bukhari & Muslim)
- Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his neighbor, and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his guest. (Bukhari & Muslim)
- Fear Allah wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good one, and it will wipe it out, and behave well towards people. (at-Tirmidhi)
- Purity is half of faith… (Muslim)
- There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm. (Ibn Majah & ad-Daraqutni)
- Whosoever removes a worldly grief from a believer, Allah will remove from him one of the griefs of the Day of Judgment. Whosoever alleviates (the lot of) a needy person, Allah will alleviate (his lot) in this world and the next. Whosoever shields a Muslim, Allah will shield him in this world and the next. Allah will aid a servant so long as the servant aids his brother. Whosoever follows a path to seek knowledge therein, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise… (Muslim)
- The strong one is not the one who can defeat others (physically). The strong one is the one who can control himself when angry. (Muslim)
- Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise… (Bukhari)

Rules
Of course every classroom needs rules. Here are a few points to consider:
- Students will be more likely to abide by the classroom management plan if they helped in designing it. Sometimes, this sounds scary especially for new teachers. However, it seems to work rather well in most situations. The teacher can

proclaim that he/she believes that the classroom belongs to the students as well as to him/her. Therefore, he/she wants them to brainstorm together to come up with the rules that would help create the best learning environment for everyone. Students are able to come up with all the rules a teacher would ever want to implement in his/her classroom. The teacher can guide the discussion to touch upon policies for completing homework, the proper behavior in class, tardiness, etc. All of these policies come down to showing respect to parents, teachers, peers, self, and ultimately to Allah subhaana wa ta'ala. For example, not doing homework shows disrespect to parents' wishes, which is displeasing to Allah subhaana wa ta'ala. It is also disrespect to self, because of all the faculties we have been blessed with and are not putting to use. Then the teacher can present the consequences that he/she should plan out ahead of time.

- There should only be a few rules (maximum of 5). They should be stated in a simple and clear manner.
- Once a rule is made, it should be enforced each time it is broken.

When Misbehavior Strikes

Before resorting to the hierarchy of consequences, there are many types of misbehaviors that can be stopped by using other techniques. Sometimes, even a look or gesture may stop the student. Usually, these students just need a gentle reminder. Here is a list of possible techniques that may work to stop misbehavior before it gets to the level of consequences:

- The look, change in voice, hand motion
- proximity
- involve the misbehaving student in a question about the topic that is being discussed
- sometimes, ignoring is the best thing
- comment, praise, and even reward a student who is doing the opposite (raising hands, on-task, following directions, etc.)
- general reminder of a rule using the words, "in case *somebody* might forget"
- approach student one-on-one and speak in a soft voice so others cannot hear
- be creative and "kinda crazy"!!! This is the best advice I got from a teacher about classroom management. He advised us to be spontaneous and always surprise students so they do not know what to expect next. For example, when a misbehavior begins to happen, the teacher can change his/her accent and continue teaching that way for the next few minutes.

Consequences (Individual & Classroom)

When rules are broken, the consequences must be implemented immediately using the 3 C's – Clarity, Consistency, and Calmness. The teacher must be very clear in the first place when the rules are made and stated. He/she must also be clear in explaining why a particular consequence is being implemented. This is crucial because the purpose behind consequences is to make children realize what they have done wrong and how to rectify the mistake. If a consequence is implemented without the child knowing and

understanding why, then it will not achieve its goal. The teacher must also be consistent in his/her implementation of the consequence. Students are quick to figure out if something is fair or not. And, if they feel that a teacher is not treating them fairly, they are ready to cry foul. It also takes away the teacher's credibility in their eyes. Finally, the teacher must be careful to deliver the consequence in a calm manner that is in accordance with the Sunnah. Alhamdulillah, we have the perfect role model in Rasulullah sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam. There are numerous examples in which he sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam had to correct others' behaviors. One such example is that of a Bedouin who began to urinate in the masjid. The sahaba were very upset and wanted to severely reprimand him. But, Rasulullah sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam stopped them and even allowed the man to finish. Then, he sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam gently explained to the man that the masjid is a place of worship. Even though the sahaba had a right to be upset, he sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam chose gentleness as the way to correct behavior. Therefore, we should follow this example in they way we try to change our students' behavior. In addition, by remaining calm, it helps the child to focus on what he/she did wrong rather than how the teacher is reacting. Here is a list of possible consequences to be implemented:

- Remind kids to sit, or even lie down and have them make wudu
- Focus on natural consequences such as: re-line up, re-walk down the hall, since you took time from me I will take time from you, etc.
- Design a handout that asks the following questions – What happened? What did I do? What could I have done differently? How will I make up for the incident?
- Make student write letter explaining what happened and why his/her response was inappropriate
- Loss of privilege – internet, free time, recess, lunch with others, group work, cannot skip problems while others can
- Silent Day – when the class as a whole is misbehaving and reminders and warnings are not working, a silent day can be implemented. This involves complete silence for the rest of the day. Students are not allowed to do anything – no homework, reading, drawing, sleeping, talking, etc. They get their classwork in the form of homework for the evening. This should be reserved as one of the last alternatives.

Incentives
There can be a variety of incentives for a classroom or an individual. It is important to not hand out incentives too quickly, too often, nor too delayed. It is also essential that students do not begin to expect and depend on material rewards always. There should be incentives that help them to become internally motivated as well. There are many incentive programs like marbles in a jar, earning coupons, etc. If a particular student is struggling with behavioral, academic, or organizational issues, he/she can be set on an individual contract and receive rewards without the rest of the class being involved. The following is a list of some of the incentives that can be used in a classroom:

- Special attention from the teacher in the form of greetings, short talks, compliments, acknowledgements, smiles, and friendly eye contact.
- Positive notes/phone calls to parents.
- Special awards--from comments on papers to certificates.
- Special privileges--five extra minutes of a desired activity for the whole class, choosing a friend with whom to work.
- Material rewards--posters, school pencils, popcorn.
- Home rewards--in collaboration with parents, privileges can be extended at home. e.g. Reading a book can earn a favorite meal.
- Group rewards--Preferred Activity Time.

With the constant reinforcement and reminders of deen along with the consistent and proactive implementation of the classroom management plan, we can encourage our students to not only be exemplary students, but also exemplary Muslims insha'Allah.

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