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A Source Of Distractions In The Classroom: The Teacher

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Studies on characteristics of good teachers and qualities of effective teachers are plentiful. Strategies of good teaching have been studied again and over again. Although poor teaching or ineffective teachers have been included in passing, less have been mentioned about the teacher as a source of distraction in the learning process.

Teachers may be knowledgeable, well planned, and enthusiastic about teaching, but if they are insensitive to the likelihood of their being or becoming a source of distraction in the learning process, they can undermine all their zeal and preparation for successful teaching. This paper summarizes the data gathered from more than 100 teacher trainees who listed the distracting features of their teachers in retrospect. Most of the trainees were participants of the elective course entitled "The Teacher's Roles" and others were tutees in the foundation course. The trainees were asked to recall their learning experience as pupils in schools when their attention was on the individual teachers instead of on the learning task. Their experience and observation offer a guide to teachers who want to reflect and self-evaluate to perfect themselves as the model and facilitator in the learning-teaching process.

Teacher distracting factors are the aspects of the teacher which take away or minimise attention of the pupils from the lesson and focus it on the teacher. Teacher distracting factors include some of their irritating habits, improper attire and mannerisms which may amuse the pupils. An amusing factor can become distracting if it continues. For easy reference, the examples of distracting features of the individual teachers are listed into eight categories. Letters in brackets indicate whether such an example applies to male (M) or female (F) teachers, or to both (M & F).

Attire

squeaky shoes (M & F)
 body-hugging clothes (M & F)
 zips not completely done
 (M & F)

too many unbuttoned buttons
 (M & F)

flashy colour clothes (M & F)

plunging neckline (F)
 fanciful stockings (F)
 dropping off bra-straps (F)
 very short skirts (F)

wearing no socks (M)
 bulging pockets (M)
 dangling cuffs of long sleeves
 (M)

flimsy clothes (M & F)
 dusty shoes (M & F)
 worn-out shoes (M & F)

heels too high (M & F)

wearing slippers (M & F)

high slits (F)
 cut-in armholes (F)
 petticoats which show (F)

shirts not properly tucked (M)
 infrequent change of pants (M)
 pants too short (M)

Hair:

hair that keeps falling over face
 (M & F)

hair covering the eye/eyes
 (M & F)

dandruff (M & F)

daily change of hairstyle (F)

constant flicking of hair (M & F)

unkempt hair (M & F)

dirty and oily hair (M & F)

fanciful hair-do (Afro style) (F)

Make-up:

strong perfume or lotion (M & F)

glossy lipsticks (F)
 heavy eye shadow (F)
 fluttering eye-lids/lashes (F)

nails too red (F)
 excessive make-up (F)

Personal Appearance:

fingernails trimmed with dirt (M & F)	long finger nail(s) (M & F)
dirty toe nails (M & F)	sleepy eyes (M & F)
unshaven face (M)	

Jewelry or Accessories:

long and swinging chains (M & F)	chunky necklaces (M & F)
too many unnecessary rings (M & F)	huge rings (M & F)
big and unusual ear-rings (F)	noisy bangles (F)
constant change of jewelry (F)	
noisy keys and chain (M)	big cowboy belts (M)

Glasses:

dark tinted glasses which hide the eyes (M & F)
dropping spectacles (M & F)
glasses of 'extraordinary shape and size (M & F)

Habit and Mannerisms

frequent scratching of head (M & F)	playing with hair (M & F)
constant rubbing of nose (M & F)	sitting on table (M & F)
clearing throat frequently (M & F)	removing shoes (M & F)
biting and licking lips constantly (M & F)	picking nose (M & F)
fondling watch or chain (M & F)	breaking knuckles (M & F)

breaking chalk unnecessarily (M & F)	shaking legs while sitting (M & F)
playing with keys, coins or chalk (M & F)	doodling on board (M & F)
yawning without covering mouth (M & F)	jerking of shoulders (M & F)
sneezing without covering mouth & nose (M & F)	
walking around while talking to the class (M & F)	
walking to and fro non-stop while teaching (M & F)	
sitting on the teacher's desk with legs crossed or wide open (F)	
pulling up trousers (M)	

Verbal Habits: Besides mispronouncing words and making grammatical errors, the excessive use of the following by both male and female teachers is annoying –

okay	alright	understand
right	you see	you know
hmm...		

Most of the above distractors do not pose serious problems to learning. But, if teachers want to maximize the attention of the pupils on the learning task, they should make conscious effort to eliminate first the source of distraction arising unintentionally and unconsciously from themselves. To ascertain whether or not they are the cause of inattentiveness, they can reflect, self-evaluate, and get a third person's opinion. Experienced teachers who are well respected by most pupils and colleagues will tell you if you ask.