

# CONFIRMING THE STATUS QUO THROUGH TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to understand 1) how teachers manipulate classroom interactions with students in a manner that it enhances teacher authority and 2) the students' response to such classroom authority.

A convenient sample of students in Year Nine classes in a leading boys' school in Colombo were studied. Non-participant classroom observation supplemented by informal interviews with the teachers and students were the main techniques of data collection. Observations were carried out over a period of 20 hours with 3-4 observers in each classroom.

All classrooms/lessons observed represented a 'traditional' classroom where the teacher dominated the teaching-learning scenario while students were *expected* to play a passive role.

Three approaches used by teachers during classroom interactions with students in order to enhance teacher authority were identified, namely the soft, the strict and the ignorant. Some teachers used a soft approach to gain control while some others used a strict approach (sometimes with physical punishment) to obtain the same. Some others were ignorant of students who were not attentive and focused only on those who paid attention to the lesson. These approaches generated different amounts of fear and respect towards the teacher among students. However, the end result in all cases was that the teacher's authority was not challenged.

Three response patterns shown by students towards teacher authority were identified namely, obedience, mockery and ignorance. The obedient student did and said what the teacher wanted to see and hear while taking part in other student activities going on in the classroom. The student who used mockery did so by always saying something 'funny' to excite the class. The ignorant student paid absolutely no attention to the lesson and engaged in activities that were unrelated to the lesson. However, it was observed that a given student's response was not fixed and that it changed according to the subject and teacher.