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From Correction to Exclusion: How Public Reprimands and Teacher Labelling Shape Adolescent Classroom Participation and School Belonging

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Abstract. Public reprimands are a common method of classroom management. However, their influence may extend beyond short-term behavioural adjustments and have long-term consequences for students' development. By synthesising relevant research on public reprimand, teacher labelling, school belonging, and self-determination theory, this essay discusses how negative interactions in the classroom affect adolescents' psychological experiences, classroom participation, and sense of school belonging. Studies have shown that public reprimand provokes negative emotions such as shame and fear, and it can undermine students' sense of competence, dignity, and peer status. As a result, students may participate less in class. Teacher labelling can also strengthen negative identities and limit students' sense of autonomy. Classroom exclusion weakens students' connection to the class. These processes frustrate psychological needs and may lower both classroom participation and students' sense of school belonging. To understand the influence of teacher feedback, it is therefore necessary to examine how these practices affect students' long-term development.

Keywords: Public Reprimands, Teacher Labelling, Classroom Participation, School Belonging, Classroom Exclusion

1. Introduction

Teacher correction is an important component of classroom practice. Effective teacher feedback not only helps students identify errors in their learning but also promotes the development of their academic abilities and self-regulation skills, while improving teacher-student relationships [1, 2]. Students unavoidably make mistakes and misunderstandings. Teacher correction guides students, helping them to identify misconceptions or regulate their behaviour. However, the way teachers deliver corrections determines whether they have a positive or negative influence on students [1]. Correction that focuses on specific behaviours or is process-oriented, such as offering suggestions for improvement, helps students recognise their errors and make improvements. However, reprimand directed at a student's personality, competences or worth may provoke a range of negative psychological reactions.

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Public reprimand may have a more profound influence during adolescence. Adolescents are in a critical developmental stage of identity formation and are particularly susceptible to peer evaluations and feedback from authority figures [3]. When students receive public reprimands, the adverse impact stems not merely from the misconduct itself, but also from the perceived threat to their competence, dignity, and social standing. Students may interpret specific behavioural failures as negative judgements of their personality, forming a self-awareness of 'inability' or 'lack of recognition'. Besides, negative reactions from peers exacerbate shame and fear. These factors may lead students to avoid classroom participation and develop resistance behaviours [3, 4]. Students' sense of school belonging may also be weakened [5-7]. Once students are labelled as 'problem students', teachers and peer interpret their behaviour through the lens of that label, and students may also internalise the label and act in accordance with it [8].

Although previous research has found that negative teacher interactions are associated with lower levels of classroom participation, learning motivation and sense of school belonging, existing studies still lack an explanation of the underlying mechanisms. Many studies have examined how teacher behaviour affects academic outcomes, but fewer have looked at how public reprimands and teacher labelling shape students' sense of school belonging through their emotional experiences and psychological responses. Using existing literature on teacher feedback, shame, and school belonging in adolescence, this paper examines the processes through which public reprimands and teacher labelling affect students' psychological experiences and coping strategies. When these disciplinary practices threaten students' sense of competence, dignity, and peer status, they weaken classroom engagement, damage teacher-student rapport, and reduce school belonging.

2. Conceptualising public reprimands and teacher labelling

It is necessary to clarify several concepts about 'correction', 'criticism', 'reprimand', 'public reprimand' and 'teacher labelling'. The ambiguity about these concepts affects our understanding of normal versus abnormal classroom interactions. Teacher correction is a form of guiding feedback. It involves the teacher addressing a student's error by identifying the mistakes and providing correct information, the answer or specific strategies for improvement [9]. In addition, criticism refers to a teacher making a negative evaluation of a student's performance or personality. It may target personal traits (You're so stupid') or the task ('Your argument lacks evidence') [2]. Reprimand further emphasises the teacher's authoritative role. Teachers express dissatisfaction with specific behaviour, intending to stop inappropriate performance. It rarely includes guidance on improvement and is classified as a management technique. When a teacher reprimands a student in front of the whole class or others, it constitutes a public reprimand. It is a public warning and may result in side effects such as shame, withdrawal from the classroom, or the reinforcement of the behaviour [10]. Moreover, teacher labelling refers to the process whereby teachers, as authorities, define certain student behaviours as 'deviant' based on school norms and their own judgements, ultimately forming a relatively stable assessment of the student's identity [11].

3. Public reprimands as a threat to competence, dignity and status

The key difference between reprimands and public reprimands is the context. Schools are highly social environments, where students' behaviour and performance are observed by both teachers and peers. When a teacher reprimands a student in public, it is no longer merely a process of providing feedback; it also becomes an event of social evaluation [12]. For adolescents undergoing identity

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development, such experiences may threaten their sense of competence, dignity, and social status among peers.

3.1. Competence threat

Public reprimand may threaten students' sense of competence, which depends on the individual's perception that they can effectively cope with challenges in their environment [13]. For example, students may feel that they can master the course material. Teachers hold considerable evaluative authority in the classroom [3]. Therefore, their judgments of students' abilities may become a critical source of information shaping students' sense of competence. When teachers reprimand students in public, particularly when it targets personality or overall ability, Students' cognitive structures of competency have been challenged [1, 5]. For instance, if a teacher implied that a student 'lacks ability', the student may begin to question their abilities and believe that they are unable to master the course matter effectively.

3.2. Dignity threat

Public reprimand may also threaten students' dignity, which refers to the inherent value of every individual and their right to be respected by others [14]. It focuses on whether students feel valued as individuals and treated with respect. Public reprimand by teachers can weaken students' sense of dignity in two ways. First, it may damage students' self-worth. When teachers frequently use negative feedback, some students may come to believe that "I am not worthy of the teacher's care and affection" [15]. Second, public reprimand of a student's academic or behavioural problems can shift into a collective judgment, which leaves students feeling disrespected [16, 17]. Particularly, when teachers use angry yelling, sarcasm, or deliberate humiliation in front of others, as these actions directly violate students' need for respect [17]. Negative experiences such as public reprimand can also influence how individuals perceive their own dignity [18]. For this reason, educators should be careful about the effect public reprimand may have on students' dignity.

3.3. Peer-status threat

Public reprimand may put a student's peer status at risk. When reprimands happen in front of classmates, students may worry that their abilities, personality, or worth will be judged differently by others, which can affect their social standing in the classroom [3]. This matters most in adolescence. At that stage, students are particularly sensitive to social evaluation and spend more neural resources trying to work out what others think of them, which can intensify concerns about peer judgment and status [19]. Teachers' behaviour also shapes how classmates see one another [12]. If a teacher reprimands a student in public, peers may take this as a sign that the student is not accepted or valued by the teacher, and their attitudes toward that student may shift as a result. In that sense, the reprimand comes from the teacher, but its effects may spread through the peer group as well. Students who are publicly reprimanded may therefore face not only disapproval from teachers, but also some degree of exclusion from classmates.

4. Shame, fear and classroom withdrawal

When students experience threats to their competence, dignity or peer status, this may trigger emotional reactions such as shame and fear. Students may adopt a range of defensive coping

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behaviours-including behavioural disengagement, social avoidance, and reduced classroom participation-to minimise the likelihood of further negative evaluation [20].

4.1. Shame and classroom silence

Shame is one of the most common psychological reactions experienced following public reprimand, which may lead to students remaining silent in class. Public reprimand often causes students to feel strong shame, as if they were 'a joke in the eyes of others'. As classroom participation entails being evaluated by teachers and peers, students hide themselves in the classroom as a self-protective strategy to avoid further negative evaluation. This may present as a reluctance to answer questions, to share opinions, or to demonstrate their abilities [21]. Research has documented that students in English language classrooms frequently withhold verbal participation out of fear of reprimand and peer ridicule, even when they have understood the instructional content and are capable of responding [4]. Furthermore, for adolescents, being observed by others itself constitutes an evaluative pressure that triggers intense feelings of embarrassment and physiological arousal [19]. Therefore, public reprimands trigger a more intense experience of shame.

4.2. Fear and help-seeking avoidances

Fear of negative feedback may also reduce students' classroom participation. When students are reprimanded in public, they may develop negative expectations regarding similar situations. For example, they may worry about giving the wrong answer, being reprimanded by the teacher, or feeling embarrassed in front of their peers again [22]. Moreover, students may avoid seeking help because they fear exposing their 'looking foolish' [23]. Students weigh learning opportunities against the risk of social evaluation and choose avoidance as a self-protective strategy to reduce the likelihood of experiencing negative evaluation again.

4.3. From self-protection to disengagement

However, the persistence of classroom silence and help-seeking avoidance may further shape students' patterns of classroom participation. The repeated employment of such defensive coping strategies by students may culminate in the formation of ingrained response patterns. As students habitually reduce their expression, interaction and requests for help, their opportunities to receive positive feedback and teacher support also diminish [24]. In the long term, this reduction may cause students to gradually disengage from the class and their teachers. A study shows that negative teacher-student interactions may also influence students' level of learning engagement [25]. Students' reduced classroom engagement may likewise be misconstrued by teachers through reliance on superficial behavioural indicators. For example, teachers may perceive these students as lacking motivation, being insufficiently effortful, or having limited ability, while overlooking the reprimand-related threats they have previously experienced [8].

5. Teacher labelling and reinforcement of negative identities

Teacher labelling is a relatively stable judgement of a student's identity formed by the teacher based on multiple classroom interactions. When teachers repeatedly use personalised public reprimands of students, this transforms the evaluation of situational behaviour into a judgment about their personality [26]. After both the teacher and peers have accepted this label, students lose the

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opportunity to repair their social image by changing their behaviour. Eventually, students internalise the label, incorporate it into their self-awareness, and behave in accordance with it [8].

5.1. From behavioural judgement to identity labelling

Teachers' interpretations of student behaviour may form the basis of such labelling. When students exhibit behaviours such as silence in class, avoidance of seeking help, and a sustained decline in participation, teachers find it difficult to discern the students' psychological state and can only make judgements based on overt behaviour. For example, when a student's classroom participation declines, this is often interpreted as a lack of engagement with learning [27], rather than the student's concern about making another mistake, fear of reprimands, or attempts to avoid negative evaluation. Following public reprimand, students may also exhibit resistant behaviours, which may represent their responses to perceived evaluative injustice or attempts to safeguard their dignity. However, teachers may interpret this as a failure to respect rules, unmanageability or problematic behaviour [27].

5.2. Differential expectations and opportunities

Once teachers develop negative labels toward students, these labels may shape teachers' subsequent interactions with those students, eventually influencing students' developmental opportunities. Teachers may unintentionally lower their expectations of those students, reducing the provision of challenging tasks, positive feedback and opportunities for in-depth interaction. For example, a 'problem student' rarely raises their hand to answer questions, yet the teacher overlooks them on the grounds of 'not having noticed' and admits to being more inclined to categorise them as 'deliberately disruptive' [26]. Teachers' existing labels can shape how they see what happens and how they respond to students. When students are overlooked, misunderstood, or given fewer chances to show what they can do, it becomes harder for them to change the teacher's initial judgement. In this way, the label is reinforced.

5.3. Label internalisation and self-fulfilling cycles

Teacher labelling can also be internalised and, over time, affect how students see themselves. During adolescence, other people's evaluations, especially those of teachers, strongly influence students' self-perception [3]. If negative labels are repeated over a long period, students may slowly absorb these judgments into their self-concept, a process referred to as label internalisation. For example, a student may be called "stupid" repeatedly by teachers and peers. After a while, he may start to accept this view of himself and think, "I am stupid" [8]. As these negative definitions are taken in, students may also lose some sense of autonomy. Their identity can begin to feel shaped by outside judgments rather than by their own choices, so their behaviour appears less self-directed and more like a response to labels imposed on them [28].

These labels may then feed back into students' behaviour. Once a student accepts a negative identity, that student may start acting in ways that fit it, for example by giving up, putting in less effort, or withdrawing from class participation. One study gives the case of a student labelled a "blockhead" who began sleeping in class to avoid making mistakes and gave up trying to "be a good student". Not all students react in the same way. Some respond through resistance, such as deliberate disruption, refusal to cooperate, or open challenges to the teacher's authority [27]. For instance, when a student is labelled as a "troublemaker", that student may begin disrupting purpose [26].

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Therefore, teacher labelling creates a cyclical process in which students' coping behaviours are interpreted as personal deficiencies, teachers' interaction patterns are shaped by these labels, and students gradually internalise and enact behaviours consistent with the labels, thereby reinforcing negative identities.

6. From classroom exclusion to weakened school belonging

6.1. Classroom exclusion by teacher and peers

When students internalise the labels applied by teachers and respond with silence or resistance, this may lead to their exclusion from classroom interactions. Students gradually lose opportunities for positive interaction, recognition and support, such as teachers no longer calling on them to answer questions. They may even be excluded from the classroom community. They may be physically isolated by being assigned separate seats and even prevented from interacting with their peers [26]. Peers may also be influenced by teachers' negative labels or cues, which may lead them to reduce their interactions and collaboration with labelled students [12, 27].

This classroom exclusion further affects students' sense of school belonging, which refers to the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others within the school or classroom [7]. It is gradually formed through ongoing social interaction. When students experience prolonged classroom exclusion, they may become isolated, neglected, and excluded from the collective by both teachers and peers. Consequently, their psychological needs are difficult to meet, which in turn affects their academic performance, mental health, behaviour and may even lead to school dropout [6]. Therefore, classroom exclusion can be regarded as a significant social process contributing to a decline in school belonging.

6.2. Psychological need frustration and school belonging

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a framework for understanding how different negative classroom experiences collectively influence students' sense of school belonging. Humans have three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness [13]. Public reprimand weakens students' sense of competence, teacher labelling limits students' sense of choice, and classroom exclusion weakens their ties with peers and teachers. In this way, these practices frustrate all three needs [6, 28]. When these needs are blocked, students may feel alienated, anxious, and less engaged in academic work. The pattern can deepen. As engagement drops, teachers may apply more negative labels, and students may participate less in class and interact less with teachers. This often leads to more reprimands, tighter control, and further disengagement, which leaves even fewer chances for students to meet these three psychological needs. Negative teacher-student interactions can therefore become a self-reinforcing cycle.

7. Research gaps and future directions

Although previous studies have separately examined the relationships between teacher reprimands, teacher labelling, and a sense of belonging at school, the existing literature still has certain limitations. Existing research tends to focus on the influence of individual classroom experiences on student development, while rarely considering how different classroom interactions jointly shape students' psychological experiences and social positions over time. Furthermore, most studies treat reprimands as a single behaviour, with only a few mentioning the distinction between public and

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private reprimands ' influence on students [10]. Additionally, existing research rarely tracks the long-term processes by which secondary school students cope with public reprimand and internalise labels. A systematic description of the complete pathway, from public reprimands to label internalisation and to the weaken school belonging, is currently lacking.

Future research could employ methods such as longitudinal studies, classroom observations and interviews to further explore the long-term processes linking teacher behaviour to students' psychological states, identity development and changes in school belonging. Furthermore, attention should be paid to supportive teacher-student relationships, peer acceptance and restorative classroom interactions, with a view to exploring how to mitigate the long-term influence of negative classroom experiences on adolescent development [29, 30].

8. Conclusion

This paper discussed how public reprimands and teacher labelling weaken adolescents' sense of school belonging through a series of psychological and social processes. Although correction by teachers serves an important educational function, public reprimand, personal evaluation, or persistent negative judgements, which may no longer function as supportive feedback but instead become a threat to students' sense of competence, dignity and peer status. These threats trigger feelings of shame and fear, which may drive students to remain silent, withdraw or even resist. Subsequently, Teacher labelling can gradually shape how students view themselves and where they seem to fit in the classroom. This can also reduce their participation. If students are repeatedly excluded from classroom interaction, their sense of belonging at school tends to weaken over time. As these experiences continue, students' basic psychological needs may be influenced step by step, and negative teacher-student interactions can become a cycle that sustains itself.

Recognising the effects of teachers' public reprimands and labelling does not mean classroom management or teacher authority are unimportant. Instead, it draws attention to how these interactions are conducted. Positive teacher feedback needs to maintain behavioural expectations while also taking account of students' psychological needs, so that students know how to improve and still feel accepted by teachers and peers.

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