

HELP FILE

Teacher Baiting

Hi,

I am a student teacher doing my practicum in a primary school. I have a few difficult students who constantly tease me, try and humiliate me and who are generally disrespectful. I've tried ignoring them but the situation is getting worse. Because I'm just a student teacher and not their regular classroom teacher, they tend to test me and ignore me no matter what I say or do to try and correct them. Also, I'm originally from overseas and have a marked accent which the children focus on and rag me about - which I find hard to deal with. Could you give me some suggestions how to handle these kids?

Jenny said

If students think they can get away with such behaviour they will do as they please. You have as much personal authority as any person in the school and you need to communicate to the children that it does not matter who their teacher is, respect and politeness is expected. Rudeness is not accepted.

As you are a student teacher it is quite within your brief to describe their behaviour to your mentoring teacher who has a responsibility to guide you. Ask your mentoring teacher what they would do in a similar situation (eg teaching in a foreign country), and how they would manage this kind of behaviour and these students. They may recommend strategies and ideas for managing these students (alternatively - read my book!)

If your mentor suggests they speak with the boys it is important the you be there and have your say – because this is your problem and because of this, it is you must manage it. The teacher can show her disapproval but you are the one who must speak with these boys – best to say something like ... "I don't speak to you rudely and in return I don't expect any of you to speak so rudely to me or to anyone else," - an 'I statement.'

Don't take the behaviour personally, instead focus on the person behind the behaviour, engage them quietly, they will teach you about themselves. This will allow you to develop a warm, trusting and productive student - teacher relationship.

You could also take the opportunity for a lesson on different peoples in the world, different cultures and different accents and play with them - being in a country where nobody speaks their language (English), and where nobody understands them Could be a very good lesson on tolerance and assisting people from other countries.

For yourself, having a different accent can be a bit of a problem, as children can sometimes find it difficult to understand and become demotivated. So using visual

aids – writing on the board, pictures, laptop and data projector can all assist in overcoming communication difficulties. Don't accept this kind of behaviour, correct them and if you have the confidence, make a joke about your accent so you can all laugh together and they don't have a reason to pick on you. This will help you connect with them.

I hope this is helpful

All best wishes

Jenny Mackay

Thanks for your follow up message.

I took your advice and it was very effective and helpful. Also, after working among the children for a while and using your skills I discovered that a number of the students came from dysfunctional families. Being able to connect with them now, they told me they were just testing me and seeking my attention. I found it was important, as you said, not to take the behaviour personally but to observe the person behind the behaviour and try to get to know their interests and build professional relationships with them. As I also showed them my love and care, I was fully able to connect with them and gain their respect.