

If you can't handle being threatened by a child, maybe you shouldn't be a teacher.

The sad fact is this has become the norm for many parents who would rather criticize their child's teacher than admit that their own child is in anyway wrong.

Mr. Kaye looked at the computer screen. The time read 10:25. If this class was going to be dismissed on time, he was going to have to get moving and minimize the distractions. The class had over ten pages scheduled to read aloud, as part of the curriculum for today. Still the class continued to yammer, as though it were lunch or maybe a crowded rock concert. Mr. Kaye raised his hand and roughly five to six of thirty in the class raised their hands. Most of the class was ignoring him, laughing, being social and exercising their freedom of ignorance. This was pretty much an everyday occurrence in Mr. Kaye's class. He had complained to many facets at the school that were supposed to support him, but in the end nothing ever seemed to be done.

Finally after Mr. Kaye started calling out, "A minutes and twenty seconds...A minute and twenty-one second," holding up a stopwatch, most of the class quieted down. There were still a few whispers toward the back, but Mr. Kaye recognized (for his class) this was as good as gets.

Mr. Kaye told the students to open their books on their desks to page 36. Then, he walked around the room, forcing many students to flip the books on their desks open to, because quiet frankly most of these children didn't care, obeying a direct order from a teacher was second nature to them.

Mr. Kaye started to read from the book, but a kid yelled out, "Kawika...Kawika...Kawika!" He was yelling across the classroom with a weird sort of quiet whisper. When Mr. Kaye looked at him, he gave his teacher a look like, "WHAT!!!"

Mr. Kaye started to read again, but he had to stop almost immediately because a girl was playing with her cell phone. He approached the girl, and she quickly shoved the cell phone between her legs, denying that she was even playing with it. Mr. Kaye continued reading, but had to stop five to ten more times for various interruptions. The time was now 10:35, and in ten minutes the class had progressed about two sentences. Mr. Kaye tried reading again, but was interrupted by spitballs and girls writing notes. Mr. Kaye called out, "Ashley put that note away." Ashley replied, "It's not a note."

Mr. Kaye warned the class one last time, "We can do this the easy way, or the HARD WAY." The class acknowledged they were going to do better, but the words were only hollow sounds coming out of their mouths. At 10:40 the class had still not even finished the first paragraph that was when Mr. Kaye put the book down. Mr. Kaye told the whole class to take out a sheet of paper, and with approximately twenty minutes left, he gave the class an assignment. He wrote it on the board.

THE HARD WAY!

READ Chapter 3

Write a full-page summary

During the next ten to fifteen minutes, many students fooled around and talked. A few were writing vigorously, but most wasted the entire time talking and laughing. AT 10:55 Mr. Kaye called the counselor, and asked her, if she could notify the cafeteria some students would be going a little late and to hold the door. Before the bell was going to ring many students began to get angry. There was swearing, some even looked as though they were going to throw temper tantrums. Mr. Kaye calmly assured the students they needed to finish the assignment before they went to lunch. Many students began to complain. Mr. Kaye told all of them the same thing. You need to finish your assignment before you go to lunch.

One student wrote Mr. Kaye a letter in which he blatantly told him he was not going to do the assignment and threatening the security of his job, saying he was going to call his Mom, and perhaps he would have Mr. Kaye fired.

After reading the letter, Mr. Kaye sprang to the telephone, "Let's call your Mom."

"Go ahead," the boy forewarned him, "She's going to be pissed you called her at work."

Mr. Kaye dialed the phone number, and after two to three minutes of waiting, got the Mom on the phone. He calmly explained the scenario, exactly as it happened.

After a long pause, the Mom asked plainly, "How did he threaten you?"

"Did he say he was going to hurt you?"

"No," Mr. Kaye replied.

"How's that a threat?" the Mom asked.

Mr. Kaye explained, how he perceived the child was trying to threaten the security of his job. The Mom replied, "That's not a threat!"

Mr. Kaye replied, "I felt threatened."

The Mom could only say, "She had to hear her son's side of the story."

Mr. Kaye assured her the story he told her was completely unbiased. The Mom continued to stick to her guns, saying she wanted to hear her son's side of the story. When Mr. Kaye realized nothing was going to be done, he asked if the Mom could come in for a parent conference immediately. The Mom told him she would come in two weeks.

Although this seems like a fictional, over-exaggerated story, this is a reality in many classrooms. This happened in my classroom. The day of the parent conference, the Mom told me in so many words, "I don't understand why you became a teacher, if you can't handle getting threatened by a child." That was it. No apology. No alibi. Apparently, I'm supposed to suck it up, because parents are going to keep allowing their children to act however they want to act. I wasn't really sure what to do about it, I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide. I felt weak and angry about the whole experience. Was I over-reacting? I didn't think so, but if I challenged this mother on her questionable parenting skills, I could be fired, or put on probation. I don't understand when it became acceptable for children to bully adults or when teachers lost all their civil rights in the classroom, but this is one teacher who is seriously considering changing careers.

About the Author

Joseph DeMarco was born in New York City; he lived most of his life in Buffalo, NY. He now teaches seventh grade on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. He is the author of the novels Plague of the Invigilare, The 4 Hundred and 20 Assassins of Emir Abdullah-Harazins, and At Play in the Killing Fields. He is currently working on several new projects.

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