



## 3 Popular Strategies You Should Stop Using With Difficult Students

Much of your success with difficult students hinges on what you *don't* do. But this is no easy task, because some of the most popular and commonly used strategies fall into this category.

When seemingly everyone around you, including your closest teacher chums, is relying on the same bundle of strategies – and complaining incessantly about how nothing is working – it can be a challenge to break from the pack.

It can be a challenge to go your own way, to refuse to follow the masses, to walk to the beat of a different drum. But if you do . . . ah, if you do . . . the sky will open and a scroll of remarkable secrets will descend to your feet.

For if you do nothing more than avoid the following three strategies, you'll discover an amazing natural ability to connect with and influence your most difficult students, paving the way for genuine, transformational improvement.

### 1. Intimidation

Any strategy that seeks to **frighten or bully students into behaving** will backfire every time. Although yelling, threatening, and scolding can result

in immediate improvement, their hurtful nature will ensure that it's merely temporary.

Their use will cause students to dislike you intensely – though often privately – which will undermine your efforts to build influential relationships with them. Thus, they won't trust you, listen to you, or even care about what you have to say.

They will, however, be driven to misbehave when you turn your back.

## **2. Persuasion**

**Trying to convince students to behave** entails telling them what they should think and how they should feel. It entails forcing an explanation of why they misbehaved and what they could have done better. It entails awkwardness and squirming discomfort.

Far from eliciting thoughtful reflection, pulling students aside interferes with the accountability process. It causes the building of heavily fortified walls, behind which they'll either parrot what you want to hear, become argumentative and disrespectful, or clam up entirely.

For lasting improvement, your students need to be given the opportunity to ponder their misbehavior, take responsibility for it, and resolve to do better *all on their own*. Your job is to lead them there through consistent accountability and a leadership presence they trust, respect, and believe in.

## **3. Capitulation**

Picking your battles, letting misbehavior go, caving in . . . capitulation amounts to giving up on difficult students. It communicates that you don't care, that they're beyond hope and not worth the trouble.

This is a devastating message that leads to more frequent and more severe misbehavior and an even deeper hole to climb out of.

Holding them to a standard of behavior they need for success in school is the most compassionate thing you can do for them. And when you offer open-armed, **no-stings-attached grace and forgiveness** on the other side, it has the power to soften the hardest of hearts.

### **Less Is More**

All three of the above strategies deepen the alienation and differentness difficult students feel. They cause resentment, distrust, and a greater compulsion to misbehave. They cause the same old, same old. Another year and another red dot on their enrollment card.

What they need is not more attention, more spirit-breaking lectures, or more weak-kneed accountability. What they need is a teacher who inspires them to take a better path.

The good news is that becoming that teacher doesn't take piling yet another thing on your plate. It doesn't take getting stressed-out or fumbling for the perfect thing to say. It doesn't take having to do anything that feels overbearing, dishonest, or manipulative.

No, the secret isn't in what you have to do.

It's in what you don't have to do.

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