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Doing the Unexpected: A Good Resource for Teachers.

When a child is expecting you to raise your voice or tell them what to do, doing something completely unconventional can be very effective, not to mention fun. It goes along with the principle of making the student do most of the thinking. As they're busy solving the problem, they're kept on their toes.

Joey is a student who tends to drag his feet and take a long time to get from one place to another. He can take what seems an eternity to get from the pencil sharpener back to his desk. I had a hunch that Joey does this because he's been able to get a lot of adults to turn red and raise their voices when he takes his time; a way he can gain control. Because of my hunch, I had chosen not to respond to his slowness so far.

I think Joey became frustrated with my lack of response. One day on the way to music class he made up his mind to get my attention. I asked the students to line up. When most kids were lined up we switched off the lights and left; the stragglers usually catch up quickly once we start moving. When I returned to the classroom from dropping off the kids. I walked in and was surprised to find Joey at his desk with his head down. He wasn't going to go slowly to music; he wasn't going at all! Knowing that the unexpected is one of my best resources, I wondered what reaction Joey typically got from other adults. If he pulled something like this he probably got chewed out, or ordered to get moving immediately (in which case he could leave very slowly and get the adult to turn various shades of purple).

I very quietly walked over to my desk, leaving the lights off, and began to grade papers. Out of the corner of my eye I watched Joey. He was committed! He didn't so much as glance up for a full five minutes. But I could just about feel him wondering why I wasn't saying anything to him. After a couple more long quiet minutes, he finally peeked up over his arm at me. I could almost hear the whir of his brain working, "Does he even know I'm here? Should I quietly make a

break for it? Oh man, if he doesn't know I'm here and I leave now, then he'll notice me and I'll have to explain what I'm doing." But I guess Joey decided it was just too boring in that dim room with me to not try slipping out.

Stealthily, Joey tiptoed to the door. Just as he was leaving the room, I piped up and called out his name in a booming voice, as if I were greeting a friend I hadn't seen in a long time, "Joey!"

He shuffled over to my desk, "Yeah?"

"I noticed you decided not to go to music today," I offered.

"Yeah?"

"Well I was just thinking. In here, you already know it's okay to sit out if you don't feel like participating and take a break, right?"

"Uh huh," he wondered where I was going with this.

"I was thinking," I calmly began, "Miss Durgan [the music teacher] may not feel the same about that policy as me. So in the future, if you don't want to participate in music you'd probably better head over first and work that out with Miss Durgan--see what her policy is on that." I smiled at him. "Thanks Joey." He left looking a bit puzzled, but he's always managed to get himself to music on time since then.

Jon had to do it. How could he pass it up?

The third week of school, when students were beginning to feel more comfortable with me, and were needing to check out some of my boundaries, I was tied up for a moment and my class had to make their way back to the room on their own. As I approached the room, I wondered how they'd done--this being the first time this year they had to come in on their own and decide what to do without direction. Most of them were pretty responsible. They'd made it back to the room, found their seats, and were talking at a reasonable level. Jon, on the other hand, seized the opportunity to enjoy a little attention, get rid of some of his energy, and entertain some of his classmates all at the same time. He was beside his desk doing what appeared to be a very energetic version of a comic disco dance--shaking his booty and flailing his arms. The students in his group who saw him were understandably in stitches.

When I rounded the corner and he saw me he made an impressive lightning quick transformation from "Disco Jonny" to "model student with somber expression and head on desk". The rest of the class fell silent as well. I could hear Jon's mind whispering over and over, "I hope he didn't see me. I hope he didn't see me." I seized the opportunity to do the unexpected. I slowly walked over to his desk (to increase dramatic effect). I think he was expecting me to raise my voice at him. Instead, I leaned over smiling, and whispered so only he could hear, "I bet you were hoping I didn't see that." I'll never forget Jon's reaction. He threw his arms over his head as if shielding himself from the falling

debris of an earthquake, and wore a classic simper on his face as if to say, "You got me!" The other kids in his group looked at one another wondering what I'd said to him. Jon and I still refer to that moment and laugh about it.

Using the unexpected can be refreshingly amusing. The kids stay on their toes, and I have a lot more fun dealing with the inevitable occasional inappropriate behavior. It seems to keep us all in a more light hearted state of mind. When I see a problem now, I tend not to shrink from it or become irritated with the student or situation, but rather look for an opportunity for the unexpected. Before I used Love and Logic I hadn't known quite how entertaining kids and their misbehaviors could be.