

C *The* CLEARING HOUSE

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A Beginning Teacher's Soliloquy

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This fabricated monologue is a synthesis of views concerning discipline as seen by first-year teachers and substitute teachers.

I entered the high school classroom with the grandest of expectations. I had prepared the lesson thoroughly, studied the material with provocative questions with direct bearing on the contemporary scene, and was therefore anxious to hear the reactions of this generation, celebrated for its awareness and maturity.

After a few days on the job, idealism was rudely shattered and the realities of the indifferent and defiant student intruded on one's rosy world. I started to feel deep regret and bitterness, but attempted to fight off resentment and resigned myself to do the best job under the circumstances. It became clear to me, however, in the course of a few days, that my efforts were meeting little success and in some cases outright opposition. There was, I found, a curious species of student, discoverable in every class, known as "homosopho," Latin for wise-guy. It became apparent that this peculiar sort of student would be my biggest headache.

The character traits of this species are easily recognizable: (1) a penchant for speaking in undertones, (2) an aversion to an open book, (3) a constant glance at his neighbors to see if he (or she—sometimes the worst offenders!) is being paid attention to, (4) cutting and critical remarks, barely audible, of the teacher's efforts to conduct class, (5) facial contortions pregnant with contempt, (6) a mocking smile, (7) a compulsion to distract students who may be genuinely interested in learning, (8) a refusal to participate in discussions that may develop, (9) an unveiled (or in more advanced homosophos, veiled) disrespect for the teacher and for his position in the classroom, and (10) a generally hostile attitude toward academics.

The initial reactions I felt were those of pro-

found contempt, disappointment, remorse, despair. The action these sentiments prompted was vengeance. Ridicule and slander, spitefully delivered harangues, flaming oratory could be my weapons. I thought long and hard about my function and position in the class. I could become, if I were to remain on that path, another homosopho, a glorified one at that.

I gradually began to control myself. I began to reconsider that peculiar species as one deserving of help, rather than one deserving of contempt. Mockery is degenerative both to the one who delivers and the one who receives it. I learned to exercise restraint, good sense, and even compassion. Nothing was gained by attacking the disease with another form of that same disease.

Teaching is a marvelous arena of human relations, and I began to operate with this in mind. Students who displayed those characteristics of the homosopho, which previously had incensed me to retaliation, were asked to see me after class, or during lunch or after school. We approached the problem honestly, candidly, and in good faith. I explained myself fully, emphasizing the role of the teacher and the responsibility he has. I asked for cooperation. I expressed my concern for the education of *all* the students which was being directly obstructed by his or her attitude in the classroom. I expressed concern over the fact that he or she was denying the benefits of education to the rest of the class certainly, but also for him or herself.

No ridicule, no threats of retaliation, no petty vengeance, no outbursts of anger, no mockery; just an understanding that cooperative effort is needed.

In most cases, this method has proven successful for me and, hopefully, will be just as workable next year.