



TEACHING OPPOSITES MEDIATION

Confidential Information for PJ Gannon, Teacher

You are PJ Gannon, an eighth-grade teacher in a Catholic middle school. Originally from England, you were educated in private British boarding schools and Princeton University in the US. At Princeton, you enrolled in the teacher certification program and found that you loved teaching. You chose teaching as a profession, despite opportunities for more lucrative career paths. You have been teaching eighth-grade English for three years at this school and for the previous two years in another district. You moved to this school when your spouse, who is of Middle Eastern descent, lost their job as an engineer. The family moved to this area because your spouse has relatives here.

You were angry and upset but not surprised to learn that seventh-grade English teacher Dale Watkins had filed a formal grievance against you, alleging harassment and professional misconduct.

You have had numerous run-ins with Dale Watkins at teachers' staff meetings because Dale apparently "doesn't believe" in correcting students' consistent problems in grammar, punctuation, or sentence structure. You think Dale is lazy. When Dale's former seventh-grade students enter your classroom, their writing is severely deficient. This forces you to spend inordinate time reviewing this material, and inadequate time on what they should be doing in the eighth grade. You have repeatedly brought this up in English department meetings. You weren't motivated by spite but by concern for the students. Dale Watkins took the criticism personally and complained to other teachers that you are a "harasser" and a "stickler without substance."

The tension between you rose last year even without a particular dispute. You believe this was because Dale's son, Martin, was a student in your eighth-grade class. Martin was a disaster as a student. Leaving aside his lack of any concept of punctuation, grammar, or order, his work was very sloppy. The longer writing assignments were always too short and displayed a complete lack of thought or care. You spent a great deal of time marking up his papers and suggested a parent conference about his writing, but neither Dale nor Martin followed up. You graded Martin's papers appropriately, with the low grades they deserved. Frankly, Martin's attitude didn't help matters. He was generally inattentive and often obnoxious and belligerent in class. You eventually stopped calling on him. You once heard him snickering about you as a "little English snot." Though you never discussed this with Dale, you strongly suspected his attitude came from what Dale must have been saying about you at home.

Once Martin had moved on to ninth grade this year, you hoped the chill would lessen. Instead, you and Dale became embroiled in a very ugly dispute. It all began when, shortly after the teaching day ended, you were asked by another eighth-grade teacher to look for a missing grammar text and an accompanying package of teaching materials. While part of the eighth-grade curriculum, they were sometimes borrowed by 7th-grade teachers for



advanced students. You knocked on the door of Dale's classroom, but no one answered. Dale appeared to have gone for the day. You entered and began looking on bookshelves and the teacher's desk. You were horrified to discover a stack of student papers spilling out over the sides of a tote bag. You could see that the student papers were dated eight weeks earlier. They were sitting on top of the grammar text, inside the tote bag. The other missing teaching materials were sitting on the desk nearby. It looked to you as if Dale was consulting the text to correct student papers.

Suddenly, Dale opened the door and shouted: "What the F___ do you think you're doing stealing my things?" Dale ran toward you, pushed you aside roughly, and yanked away tote bag and the stack of papers. You pushed back, and said: "Hey, watch it, don't be so rough" and then reached to grab the chair to stop yourself from falling. Dale yelled: "Oh, now you're going to slug me with a chair?" Dale twisted and grabbed the chair from you, using it to knock you to the floor, and then swung the heavy tote bag, which hit you in the face.

You screamed for Dale to stop. From a humiliating position on the floor, you yelled: "Stop being ridiculous! I was just looking for a missing book." Dale didn't apologize, didn't help you off the floor, but yelled: "You conniving snotty thief! How dare you go into my personal bag, and steal my things? What gives you the right to enter my classroom? No one has the right to go through my papers, not even an F—ing Princeton nitwit."

You said Dale had misunderstood your motives, that you hadn't meant to look through anything personal, that the book was needed by the eighth grade and belonged to the school, and that Dale shouldn't wait eight weeks to hand back student papers. As you made a hasty retreat from the room, you tried to reassure Dale that you wouldn't report the physical attack and hoped the papers would be handed back soon. You added that you hoped no harm would come from the misunderstanding.

A few days later, you asked Dale how the student papers were going. Dale ignored you. You thought more and more about the incident over the next week. You knew that Dale preferred to teach units on reading and analyzing poetry. You also knew that Dale's family background was less affluent and that their diction and grammar were not perfect in faculty meetings and memoranda. You suspect that Dale resents your privileged background and that your diagnosis was correct: perhaps Dale wasn't secure about grammar rules. After consulting your conscience, you decided to try to mend things. The next day, you again asked if Dale wanted help with the papers because they do take a long time to mark. Dale absolutely blew up and told you to stop the "constant threats and harassment." Apparently, Dale then decided to make a formal complaint. Of course, you made a complaint about Dale, based upon the outrageous unprofessional language and physical assault, as well as professional incompetence.



Your Core Concerns and Behaviors in Mediation

Affiliation

You believe Dale resents and despises you and everything you represent. You don't see that you have anything in common. You suspect that Dale is resentful because of your wealthy background and Princeton degree. You think Dale is suspicious because you are not Catholic (in fact, you are an atheist), and your spouse is a Muslim of Middle Eastern descent. You know that Dale and Dale's spouse are faithful Catholics, products of Catholic schools. You have your doubts about Dale's work habits. You know that Dale is enthusiastic and charismatic, and students like their freewheeling style.

You also know that Dale's son Martin HATED your English class, and you are sure Martin said terrible things about you to Dale.

Appreciation

You feel that Dale looks down on you because you are young and less experienced, and that Dale doesn't value how hard you have worked to fit into the school.

It also galls you that you had initially decided NOT to press charges against Dale and had even offered to HELP with the ungraded papers. Dale is giving you NO credit for being constructive, or for your pure motives when searching for the book in Dale's classroom.

Behaviors You Exhibit

Deny all accusations (even if they are a little bit true).

Blame Dale for everything possible.

Repeat arguments and comments.

Accuse Dale of incompetence.

Take as much "airtime" as possible – interrupt.