

Disruption: A Micro-Normative Case Study

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Adam is making wisecracks and asking obscure questions while his teacher, Mrs. Wilson, is trying to lecture on the Constitutional Convention. This is preventing the other 26 students in the class from learning the material. Adam has considerable trouble with impulse control, and in fact has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that recommends modifications that will help him control his behavior. But the paraprofessional who usually helps Adam went home sick after first period, and Mrs. Wilson didn't have any time to modify the lesson before Adam came to her in third period. Although a couple of students are frustrated by the disruption, most of them are enjoying the spectacle. They're sufficiently uninterested in the Constitutional Convention that they're happy to watch Adam clown around instead. Mrs. Wilson suspects that Adam is trying to throw class off because he's worried he won't be able to do the worksheet based on her lecture. Also, Adam's reading skills are among the worst in the class, and the students know they will soon have to tackle a challenging excerpt from *The Federalist Papers*.

See the back of the sheet for reflection/discussion questions about this case.

Disruption: Guiding Questions

(1) How do you think Mrs. Wilson should respond? Why? How is the response you propose fair to Adam? How is it fair to the other students?

(2) Here are some possible responses from Mrs. Wilson. For each response, ask yourself or discuss with your colleagues: Would it be fair to Adam? Would it be fair to the other students? What other considerations are relevant?

(a) Mrs. Wilson tells the other students to ignore Adam, and then she keeps lecturing over his disruptions. Because she has to go more slowly and repeat herself more often, she doesn't get to the end of the lecture. She tells the students she'll post the lecture notes on the class website, and they should finish going through them at home that evening.

(b) Mrs. Wilson calls the office and has Adam removed from class for the rest of the period. "It's not fair to disrupt other students' learning, Adam," she explains as he collects his books to leave. She tells him she doesn't have materials he can take with him, but he can log onto the class website that night and try to catch up.

(c) Mrs. Wilson assigns Brianna, who regularly earns As in the class and who Adam has a crush on, to sit next to Adam and help him out. She knows Adam will focus on Brianna and stop disrupting the class, and that Brianna can always catch up on her work that night. Brianna looks frustrated, whispering to Mrs. Wilson, "Do I have to? I already helped him out twice last week! I wanted to read out James Madison's lines today." Mrs. Wilson looks sympathetic and apologizes for calling on her again to help out, and Brianna grudgingly moves next to Adam.

(3) Do you think this kind of case—either this one in particular, or another one like it—would be useful for teachers to be able to talk about with one another? Why or why not?

(4) What else would you want to know or have included in a case like this?

(5) Have you ever seen or been part of a similar situation where you felt the outcome wasn't fair, or on the other hand where you were really impressed by how the problem was resolved? What happened, and why did you feel the way you did?

(6) What are your take-aways from having talked through this case?