

## **Kevin and the Highway Patrol Cop**

Just after I graduated from college I went to work in Manitoba, Canada at a Summer School.

It was an amazing experience generally but the highlight was meeting and working with a guy called Kevin Parker.

He was in his mid 20's and had a huge talent for interactive teaching and using in-role to lead large groups of children.

He was fairly tall and had a fantastic presence.

I had elected to be his teaching assistant when I heard he was doing drama lessons.

He called his class FBI games - Freedom Before Instruction, it sounded cool but he was really teaching drama.

I would learn from him during a few lessons, far more than in the 4 years I'd just completed at teacher training college.

His creative behavioural management methods were particularly fascinating to watch and learn from.

I remember an occasion when he was briefing a group and a boy was nudging and giggling with someone near to the back.

Kevin kept on with his intro and most of the children were totally enraptured.

I kept wondering when is he going to sort out this kid at the back.

He sensed my anxiety and gave me a confident, knowing smile.

Suddenly Kevin said he needed a partner to demonstrate the scene he had been describing.

He scanned the group as if genuinely looking for a helper..... and chose the boy who was messing around.

This boy liked attention and was popular for his cocky attitude.

He just had to rise to the challenge.

He came to the front and Kevin supported him without judgement, very serious in his allocation of the role.

The scene involved a difficult confrontation between a speeding driver and a highway patrol cop.

Kevin would be the driver of the car and the boy would be the highway cop.

Kevin explained that this highway cop is a young guy and wants to impress his senior officers that he can handle the job and do the right thing.

Cleverly Kevin had given him the responsible, formal, law abiding role.

He discussed a couple of details - he would have to show the driver his badge and might want to give him a ticket so he needs to be ready.

Kevin then sits on a chair as if driving the car.

The boy stands beside him and Kevin mimes rolling down the window (this is 1979)

Kevin's in role character is very difficult. He wants to know why he has been pulled over, immediately drawing the boy into the role and dialogue.

The boy rises to the challenge and plays the part of the highway cop very well.

Kevin argues about his speeding, other people are speeding, he's been picked on, says he won't pay the fine and is generally fairly obnoxious.

He comes up with excuses for the speeding and says the highway cop is young and doesn't know what he's doing.

The other students watching are totally transfixed by the interaction between them.

Kevin has played out a role reversal here putting himself in the role of the offender.

The boy who had been sitting there messing about, muttering and giggling is now on the receiving end **but it is inside the lesson**.

At the end of the demo Kevin praises the boy for his input and he is beaming.

The scene is now done in pairs by everyone and guess what - the boy chooses the role of the highway cop again and not the mouthy driver!

Watching this situation develop, changed the whole way I looked at managing behaviours.

I learned not to jump straight in to reprimand.

Rather to wait, stay calm, stay confident and use a tactic like this which is supportive rather than punitive and changes everything.

Kevin never had any bother with that boy again, it was as if they had an understanding.

The Kevin story might not work every time but I've found it to be extremely useful over my many years of teaching.

You can try the Highway Cop story with your own class - here is Kevin's lesson development

In the next section of the lesson Kevin wanted the students to think how this situation might have been different.

What if there had been a real serious emergency, perhaps other people are in the car.

His idea was to explore the idea that things are not always what they seem at first.

There might be a way to feel empathy for that argumentative driver.

Kevin didn't discuss this too much with the students.

He wanted them to get into groups and think for themselves what could have been happening and again to consider the response of the highway cop.

The students then got into groups of about 4 and had their own discussions before trying the scene.

I can recall some of the scenes that they created - kids in the back late for a party outing, pregnant wife about to give birth, going home for forgotten passports before a flight.

One group actually stuck with the first two characters but introduced people from another car that stopped to see what was going on because the young cop had blocked the road.

There truly was a variety of ideas and I learned that sometimes the initial stimulus (here being that short paired confrontation) is all you really need.

If Kevin had openly discussed ideas before they worked on the scenes, it's likely the group scenes would be influenced by that discussion.

Try the scenes for yourself and see what your own class does.

When I left Canada I worked in Primary Schools in Fife and Edinburgh over the course of 13 years.

I opted to teach in areas of deprivation where behaviours in schools were challenging but I got a huge sense of achievement always.

I opened The Drama Studio in April 1993.

I never saw Kevin again after that summer. I regret this immensely. I should have told him the influence he would have in shaping my teaching.

I read that he became Dr Kevin Parker, renowned for his many talents, he was Director of the Psychology Clinic at Queen's University in Kingston Ontario. He passed away in 2015.

He was truly a fantastic teacher.

Julie

Interactive learning has never been more needed than now at a time when we have to get our students to experience life beyond their devices.

Drama teaching has everything you need to provide these experiences.

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