

From the desk of: Ms. Natalie M. Williams

Kevin Kent  
Science Teacher  
John F. Kennedy High School

October 17, 2005

Mr. Kent,

On October 17 th, at the close of our 2 nd period class; you started calling out names in order to record class attendance. I stated to you “ I should think that you would know the students names by now.” You indicated that you thought that I was being disrespectful to you in front of the students and complained to the heads of the science department. We later had a meeting in Mr. Colón’s office during 3 rd period. (In addition to you and myself; Ali Shama, Robert Colón and Lynn Winderbaum were also present). Ms. Winderbaum pointed out that “if Mr. Colon or Mr. Shama had said that, you would have interpreted it differently”.

You also made comments at the meeting regarding my videotaping the class. You said that you did not want to be videotaped and that you don’t want to be videotaped “ everyday”. I informed you that I had only videotaped for three days. I explained that I was recording period 2 living environment in order to fulfill licensure requirements for a chemistry teacher certification. The basic chemistry introductions that we provide in living environment on topics such as the elements found in living things, chemical bonding, nutrients, photosynthesis and DNA are all appropriate areas in which to videotape a lesson for chemistry certification. I had been having problems with my camera battery. It had been failing to hold a charge. I therefore had to make other attempts to videotape. I have ordered a new battery and charger and expect to videotape living environment classes when we teach a chemistry related topic. If you do not want to be videotaped; please stay out of the frame of view of the camera on the day that I record.

I pointed out in the meeting that I have made repeated requests to you to provide me with copies of the class attendance lists and other pertinent student information. You have thus far refused to provide it. Mr. Colón and Mr. Shama both commented that “of course, the class information should be shared” in a collaborative teaching arrangement. Still, I have not received any class ‘bubble sheets’ from you. Mr. Colon has written to me requesting this information (Exhibit A). Unfortunately, I was unable to provide him with it. The text of his letter and my response are as follows:

Ms. Williams,  
Could you kindly give me a copy of yesterday’s attendance for your 6 th period class?  
Thanks,  
RC

10/14/05  
Dear Mr. Colon,  
Mr. Kent takes the attendance and has refused to provide me with copies of the attendance bubbles.  
NW

[I have requested that the administration add my name to the teacher line for class attendance and grade lists, as it currently only has your name listed].

Mr. Kent, I have noticed that you have used numerous methods to undermine my authority in the team teaching pairing to which we have been involuntarily assigned.

I had been collecting video release forms from students so that there would be student and parent consent to videotape the class. My stack of photo release forms for period 2 mysteriously disappeared from my notebook; I noticed them gone shortly after my period 2 class with you. (Fortunately for me, I had made copies of most of them.) My notebooks were left on the teacher’s lab bench while I taught and wrote on the

## Ms. Natalie M. Williams

blackboard; it is unlikely that a student would have the access or the interest in taking them. Did you?

I had requested that students prepare a lab report that would demonstrate their application of the scientific method to an actual experiment. I requested that the students germinate seeds in salt water and in freshwater and record observations over a period of 2 weeks. They were then to submit a lab report for a class project grade. One student reported to me that you told him to throw his seed packets out (Exhibit B). Another informed me that you advised her to “throw away that junk” as Ms. Williams will not be teaching you anymore (Exhibit C). These students have provided written statements. They read as follows:

10/14/05

To Ms. Williams

I'm writing this letter to let you know that I didn't do the lab report 'cause Mr. Kent told me to throw it away.

From: José J.

10/14/05

To: Principal (Anthony Rotunno)

Mr. Kent was so happy to verify that Ms. Williams was going to be removed a week ago, he would go head and talk about Ms. Williams about how she got issues and she be losing it, and I thought it was wrong because you disrespecting another teacher behind her back. Now the beginning of school, she told us to make a project it was simple, easy and was going to give us a grade upon our report cards. So one day Ms. Williams was absent Mr. Kent was constantly talking about her and said throw those projects away if you have them, you don't have to worry about that junk.

From: Sharella D. OSIS#

Mr. Kent; why are you doing this? I thought we were 'a team'; and that “we were to work together” as if this was a “marriage”?

On Friday, October 14, 2005; my demonstration on the water purification technique of distillation was missing the heater and the flask of 'dirty' water. The set-up was complete and used without incident during 6th period; in the Earth Science class that we share. I could not find all of the equipment for the demonstration for my 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> period classes. Do you take the equipment in an attempt to sabotage my demonstration?

Mr. Rotunno has written me a letter indicating that you told him that certain students in the 2nd period class were “afraid of Ms. Williams” and that “they did not want to be videotaped”. I have asked the student to whom I believe you refer to write statements regarding the matter. I have obtained video release forms from all of the students in our 2<sup>nd</sup> period class, none of them seem to fear me. Why are you inventing these hate and fear mongering stories and reporting them to the principal?

Mr. Rotunno later writes that you told him that “Ms. Williams said that Mr. Rotunno wants to fire her”. As I doubt that a student would have approached Mr. Rotunno with such information, the 'informant' is most likely you. You do seem quite confident that I am going to be removed from my team teaching assignment with you; so much so that you have informed me that you don't feel that you should bother giving me class information because I will not longer be teaching the class; You have also made statements to that effect to the students.

Such statements and actions on your part have only created conflict and tension in the classroom. How can I effectively teach when you take such aggressive actions to undermine my authority? So long as we are assigned to team teach, I ask that you present a respectful and pleasant demeanor toward me in front of the children. I will do the same.

## From the desk of: Ms. Natalie M. Williams

In closing, I would like to say that we are very different people. On the surface, we could not possibly be more different. You: an older, white, orthodox Jewish man. Me: a younger, Black woman of afro-latina heritage. We will have to cross cultural, ethnic, gender and class divides if we are to successfully work together.

I think that we have largely experienced issues of conflict stemming from our culturally engrained expectations of the roles of men and women. Unlike in your tradition; we women of the modern world are allowed to hold jobs and speak our minds. Twenty-first century American women are, by law, free from overt subjugation by men. Welcome to my world.

I too, take note that we also have different styles of communication with our largely Black and Hispanic students. Because of this, their response to each of us has differed dramatically.

I recognize that we have a lot to learn from one another. Your talents in administrating the attendance and lateness of the class are recognized by me. I have taken your example to heart and have been astute in my recording of photo release forms and class grade data. I thank you for your comments at the meeting, in saying that I am “very creative”.

I am willing to work with you in creating hands-on activities that will enhance the classroom experience. As many of our students are native Spanish speakers; I have a concern that the topics that you have presented in your lecture-style of teaching, are not getting through to them. For example; I doubt that the living environment students have a true comprehension of carbohydrates, proteins or fats. You gave this lesson in lecture style without providing any engaging activities for them to participate in.

A major principle in teaching can be summarized as follows:

“If I hear it, I’ll forget. If I see it, I’ll remember. If I do it, I will learn it”.

I try to apply this concept to my daily lessons. I suggest that you employ similar technique to make your classes more interesting for the students.

Regarding videotaping, I would suggest that a teacher who is confident of her or his teaching abilities will not be reticent to being videotaped. I audio and video record myself frequently. It has dramatically improved my presentation skills and has allowed me to critique myself; so that I may create clear, concise and demonstrative lessons. Perhaps, at a later time, you might want to adopt this practice for yourself.

Grades are due on October 20, 2005. Let’s meet to discuss them shortly.

I would like to review your lesson plans for the living environment and earth science classes that we share. In particular, I have a concern that the earth science students did not understand your explanations of field mapping, drawing profiles and contour mapping. Given that it is crucial to their success in subsequent sections and will be part of the Earth Science Regent’s exam; I expect that I will need to return to this topic for at least one day next week. Please provide me with copies of your lesson plans to review. I will of course; also have mine ready for you to see. [Perhaps we might even plan a lesson ‘together’?]

As you have made an issue of our team teaching dynamic with the school administration; it is likely that we will be observed in the near future. In order to prepare for this, as well as to decide on student grades; I suggest that we meet during 3<sup>rd</sup> period on Monday (October 17) or Tuesday (October 18). Please also bring me copies of the attendance sheets and grade sheets.

Sincerely,

Ms. Natalie M. Williams  
Science Teacher

## Ms. Natalie M. Williams

### Attachments:

Note to Ms. Williams from R. Colón (Exhibit A)

Letter to Ms. Williams from José Javier (Exhibit B)

Letter to Mr. Rotunno from Sharella Drakes (Exhibit C)

Grass Seed Project Lab Report Sheets

### Cc.

Ms. Diane Stillman; UFT Representative

Ms. Lynn Winderbaum, Bronx UFT District Representative

Mr. Ali Shama; AP Science, Music, Art, Business and Technology

Mr. Robert Colón; Science Department Coordinator

Mr. Anthony Rotunno; Principal