

Vocational High School Teaching in a Nutshell

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I was both nervous and excited on my first day of teaching. I had been given a vocational electronic high school which was good news as my preference was to teach students of that age group.

Well, at least I thought it was good news.

“These kids are something else,” my co-teacher, who is also new to the school, tells me on my first day.

He wasn't wrong. I had teaching experience from back home in England, and after the EPIK orientation lectures I felt confident. I was armed with lots of materials and ideas and was ready to teach. But nothing prepared me for what I was about to experience.

Working in a rural high school, the students speak very little English, and what's more they have no interest in learning it, or any other subject for that matter. Put simply, they do not want to be at school.

It's safe to say this wasn't really the picture I'd built up of life in Korean schools. After this realisation set in I began to feel disheartened – I'd just moved my entire life to the other side of the world to teach, and instead I felt like I was a support worker for young adults with challenging behaviour. Most lessons consisted of students either fighting or sleeping.

Luckily, I'm now five months into my contract and things have changed for the better. Lessons are a success and I love working at my school. Unsurprisingly, there is no quick fix solution and things take time. I had to accept the school for the way it is, get to know and *understand* the students, build up a relationship with them and treat them with respect.

Sadly, in the case of my school, many have difficult backgrounds - often coming from broken families or in some cases having no family. Understanding this made me approach my job from a different angle. Being authoritarian or overly strict has no effect because they get treated this way so often outside of school. So give them positive reinforcement instead, and compliment their good behavior - however sparse it

may be.

And most important? Make the lessons *fun* – it may be stating the obvious but by using games and activities I can get almost all the students engaged and speaking English. My number one rule is getting them engaged, and my number two rule is learning English. If you achieve rule one then rule two will follow naturally. I firmly believe that giving them a lesson that they can look forward to is the key to success.

Don't get me wrong, it's not all rainbows and sunshine, there are times when the students can be very frustrating, but that only helps to highlight the success and sense of achievement when things go well.

And the other positive aspects? There are so many! I have complete control over my lesson content and I don't have to follow text books. Lesson planning can be kept to a minimum and lessons are very informal, as are the staff and general atmosphere in school. Not to mention being able to witness the crazy antics these students get up to on a daily basis - for professional purposes I'll abstain from further comment!

If I have to offer one last piece of advice it is this - all schools are different, all students are different and all teachers are different. Therefore effective methods of teaching will be different. Listen and take on board advice from others as it's hugely important, but take it for exactly what it is - advice and not fact. That is what I am offering here and hopefully it will be some use to you. Happy teaching!

