

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER?

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Research indicates that the best teachers possess two fundamental attributes: 1. They know the subject matter being taught, and 2. They enjoy children as human beings and love to work with children and youth. They enjoy the company of young people.

While these two attributes form the foundation of great teaching, there are also several personality traits that make teachers successful. These include enthusiasm (for learning and for learning activities), clear teaching objectives or sense of direction for their teaching, organizational and management skills (good teaching just doesn't happen spontaneously), and a solid sense of fairness and honesty. (young people can sense a phony a mile away and also have a strong sense of fairness).

Teachers of elementary and secondary school students have a slightly different focus and exhibit somewhat different classroom behavior. For children, the teacher must be attentive and nurturing and patient and caring almost to the point of parenthood. Teachers of adolescents must not be quite so "close" as teenagers do not appreciate coddling! Rather, teachers of adolescents provide guidance and advice about choices and most of all, point out the consequences of decisions both beneficial and harmful. Teachers attempt to get students to make mature judgments on their own and to understand the consequences of poor and of good decision making. Personal responsibility for older students becomes more important than with elementary school students who generally live and learn in a more protected environment.

Of course each teacher is unique and their "connection" with students, so important to motivating students, is often made in unique ways. These techniques are often described as a "bag of tricks" but really are superb professional insight, often gained through long experience, about what gets kids excited about learning in a particular content field or at a specific grade level.

Finally, students are moving targets, they are growing and changing constantly. Fourteen-year-old Susan in September is not fourteen-year-old Susan in June. So teachers must be flexible enough to sense the many developing changes in individual students and respond in a way that challenges but also supports them as they grow and mature.

Yes, teaching is demanding work requiring an alert mind and a high energy level!