

Qualities of the Best Teachers

From a Principal's Point of View

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Once you are given the privilege of being an educator and then a Principal this honor becomes an indelible mark on your very being. You think of most things from the perspective of a Principal. You find yourself giving directions in grocery stores, moving items from people's (total strangers) pathways for their safety and you feel an immense pressure on outings with friends and family as you can never let go of the idea that you are fully responsible for everyone's educational experience and enjoyment. And you never leave home, not even step outside for a minute without your cell phone so that the world could reach you no matter what time of day or night. There is an emergency somewhere that you must take care of at a moment's notice. You just can't let go.

As Principal the one responsibility that I could not seem to relinquish or delegate on any level was the interviewing and hiring of teachers that were to work at the school in which I was Principal. I seem to have a sixth sense about the people I wanted to hire to educate the children, the precious charges I was given the responsibility for each day. My office staff would joke with me about the length of my interviews and often times was sent very appreciative notes by the prospective teachers for the honor of "time" given to them in their quest for the position of teacher. This really is serious business.

Always proud of the interviews that I conducted, the one question that I asked each potential teacher was, "What is so special about

you that if you told me right now I would jump up and say without a moment's hesitation, if all your paperwork and credentials are in order, you are hired?" This question stumped so many interviewees and this puzzled me. Repeatedly this reaction solidified the idea that many people who wanted to be a teacher or were teachers and just looking to change their environment had not really reflected on the reasons that made them unique and more qualified than the next person. It appeared that they did not know themselves, which raised a question to my mind, can someone help guide a student to their strengths if they weren't sure of their own?

So what are those qualities that make one educator stand out among the rest? After reading several articles on "Best Teacher Qualities" it seems that first, there has not been an extensive amount of research on this topic and second, each article seemed to echo the others. Each quality mentioned seems to identify an emotional or aesthetic indicator.

Qualities on the list would appear like this:

- Compassionate
- Passionate
- Patient
- Understanding
- Motivational
- Sensitive
- Love of Learning
- Skilled
- Positive
- Receptive
- Friendly
- Approachable
- Encouraging

While all of the above mentioned are admirable qualities, one must ask of whom? Quite frankly a number of professionals need to have those qualifications in order to be the best: doctors, guidance counselors, mothers, decorators, and the list goes on, so it seems. What makes a teacher the best?

Teachers need to have self confidence and resilience. As wonderful as children are they can also be quite misanthropic at times. Teachers need to be able to stand in front of a class of eager children who WILL tell you the truth about almost anything without being prompted and at any time.

Teachers need to be able to work hard to organize activities for 20- 175 students, depending on the level that they teach, keep the activities organized, goal and achievement centric, timed to the second and conclude with the reflection of the meaning for each student before them. Good teachers focus the students and themselves on the purpose of the learning, how it affects them and others around them. They introduce varied minds to a topic that many might think unnecessary and bring all before them, even the doubters, to a crescendo of ultimate understanding and love of the topic at hand, all in time for a review and the bell.

One cannot profess to be a good teacher and not be able to be the ultimate planner and executor regardless of the tremendous amount of interruptions and extra curricula needs of the school in its entirety. Assemblies, fire drills, morning announcements, in the middle of the day announcements, parties, student illnesses, late students, early students, surprise visits by parents, surprise visits by your colleagues, surprise visits by the administration, observations, classroom walkthroughs, loss of electricity, an uncooperative piece of technology, just to name a few.

A great teacher will stay late to ready one's class for the next day, coordinate what will be for dinner for his or her family while still at school. Then after the carefully planned dinner will stay up until all hours, grading papers completed for the days learning experience and then still ready some materials for the lesson for the next day, making sure to meet the individual needs of all their students.

Teachers who stand out above the rest have beautifully organized classrooms. Bulletin boards are current and meaningful to the students about the topics that they are studying and coordinated with the seasons. This represents hours after the children have gone and early arrivals before the school day begins. And the best of the best do this with a smile, little sleep that is not apparent and ready at a moment's notice to take on any challenge that may arise. Their class is organized and disciplined, never any amount of unplanned disorganization. Students move about and are actively involved always with a sense of purpose and organization. Everyone is valued. No one less than the other, the joy and excitement of diversity rules each day.

Teachers need to be a part of the "whole" school. Their world cannot begin and end in their classrooms. They will reach out and take leadership positions, sponsor clubs, in other words do the impossible and make it appear seemingly easy to do along with the other tasks at hand.

Teachers are confident in themselves and model that for students each and every day. Students can see that no matter the problem there will be solutions ahead and all things will be status quo once again without missing a beat.

The best teachers plan meticulously, they evaluate student learning carefully and offer extra help whenever needed. They assess and reassess until they are confident that they have done everything possible to bring each student to their top performance while keeping parents informed, included and aware.

Finally, the best teachers are reflective. They constantly evaluate themselves and the effectiveness of their lessons and efforts on the part of their students and colleagues.

When I would find a person who had all these qualities and loving the idea of learning how to

do more, be better than they already were at reaching the students, stretching their students to the highest achievement, that is the person I would want to hire, immediately.

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