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Critical Attributes of a Teacher

In order for a person to be a successful teacher, he or she must be flexible. Flexibility is perhaps the most important trait of a teacher. Teachers must adapt their thinking to that of the student, constantly asking themselves “*What is the student thinking?”* Teachers must be able to view new content as though it were their first time to encounter it too. Assume nothing. The teacher must be able to determine what the student’s prior knowledge is and base the students learning from that point before progress can be made.

A teacher must be the master of his or her content area. They don’t have to be an expert (although they should strive to be!), but they need to have truly mastered what it is they are teaching. Too often people will take the job of a teacher and teach whatever is available. This benefits almost no one. The students get a mediocre education and the teacher stays confused and miserable – generally speaking of course. The teacher should be able to answer questions students may have about the content area. *Where does this fit into the larger picture? Why do we have to know this? How will this benefit me in this class? In life?* The old “because I said so” line won’t cut it. The teacher must be able to perform above and beyond the level at which student’s are asked to perform. The teacher needs to be able to model proper form and recall of appropriate facts.

A teacher should be willing to continue learning. This ties in directly to becoming a content master. By properly mastering an academic field, a teacher should realize that he or she is not the world’s expert on all things pertaining to that field. In a statement that sounds like it was taken from Zen Buddhism: the more you learn, the more you realize how little you actually know. True masters should understand they don’t have all the answers and are unashamed to admit that truth, by doing so they are open to grow and strengthen their understanding of a field.

A teacher must be sympathetic. The level of sympathy, of course, varies by age group and situation. The teacher will need to be understanding that students have more than one class going on (another reason to cross content areas) and sympathetic to influences on the student from outside the classroom and school grounds. *What is the student’s home life like? Is this student able to perform at this level?*

Finally, a teacher must be organized and have a consistent system that students will come to expect. Organization helps both student and teacher. Being organized shows both a preparation for teaching as well as gives students a model for how to conduct themselves. Consistency is also key. Consistency gives way to student comfort. Comfortable students are more receptive to learning. They understand their expectations and know what they must do.

When you take all of these concepts and create a checklist, some of the world’s most effective teachers will exude these qualities. Some may be more pronounced than others, some may be lacking in one, but the quality is still there. Of course, the one quality that every great teacher possesses is dedication. Without dedication, none of the other qualities will show in their lessons or classrooms. By being dedicated, this list of qualities will follow naturally.