

## CHAPTER ONE

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# *On Being a Teacher*

*Who was the best teacher you ever had? Which mentor immediately stands out as the one who has been most influential and inspirational in your life? This could have been a teacher from elementary school, or high school, or college. It could be a coach or a neighbor or a relative. Whoever it was, your teacher was someone who was an absolute master at helping you learn far more than you ever imagined possible.*

**B**ring to mind a clear image of this remarkable teacher. Hear your teacher's voice, concentrating on not only its unique resonance and tone but also some special message that still haunts you. Feel the inspiration that still lives within you as a result of your relationship with this teacher. Think about the personal qualities this person exuded that commanded your respect and reverence.

As you recall memories of this individual who was such a powerful model in your life, it is likely that you can identify and list certain personal characteristics that were most powerful. As you review this list of qualities, it may surprise you to realize that very few of these notable attributes have to do with the content of what this teacher taught or even with personal teaching methods.

What is ironic about this phenomenon is that much of teacher preparation continues to be focused on methods courses and in areas of content specialty. The assumption behind this training for elementary and secondary teachers is that when you study a subject in depth and learn the proper methods of instruction, presumably

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you then become a more competent and outstanding teacher. Not included in this process are a number of other variables that make up the essence of all great educators and infuse them with power—their distinctly human dimensions, including personality traits, attitudes, and relationship skills.

This is not to say that the best educators are not experts in their fields, because they are. Current legislation under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 calls for a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom by the end of the 2005–2006 school year and the use of research-based practices (Ryan & Cooper, 2004; Yell & Drasgow, 2005.) Teachers in core academic areas must be licensed by their state demonstrating they possess content knowledge through college coursework, examination, or through a process in which the district examines teacher qualifications in terms of subject expertise known as the “high objective uniform state standard of evaluation” or HOUSSE. The core academic areas are English, reading-language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, art, history, and geography. There are some outstanding resources to help build your technical expertise (see Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992; Borich, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Joyce, Weil, Calhoun, & Joyce, 2003; Slavin, 2002), as well as solid advice from master practitioners (see Gill, 1998; Kottler, Kottler, & Kottler, 2004; Palmer, 1998; Scheidecker & Freeman, 1999; Stone, 1999). Nor are we implying that it is possible to be a superlative teacher, coach, mentor, or parent without extensive knowledge of human learning and mastery of interpersonal communication. But all the knowledge and skills in the world are virtually useless to teachers who cannot convey their meaning to learners in a personally designed way. Likewise, all the methods crammed into a teacher’s bag of tricks are of little help to someone who cannot translate their value in a style that commands others’ attention and influences their behavior.

It is the human dimension that gives all teachers, whether in the classroom, the sports arena, or the home, their power as effective influencers. When you review the list of qualities that made your best teachers effective, you probably noticed that so much of what made a difference in your life was not what they did, but who they were as human beings. They exhibited certain characteristics that helped you to trust them, to believe in them. It did not matter whether they taught physics or ballet, grammar or bicycle repair; you would sit at their feet and listen, enraptured by the magic they

could create with the spoken word and with their actions. They could get you to do things that you never dreamed were possible. It was not so much that you cared deeply about what they were teaching as that you found yourself so intrigued by them as people. You respected them and felt connected to them in some profound way that transcended the content of their instruction. You responded to their example and encouragement. You began to see dimensions of yourself you were previously unaware of—special gifts, skills, ideas. Under their caring instruction, you began to know and value your unique self and find confidence in your personal voice.

### **NEGLECT OF THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING**

In spite of your own personal experiences in being profoundly influenced by mentors and teachers who were eccentric, unique, or otherwise showed a distinctive character, there has not been a lot of attention directed to this important subject. In a classic handbook for teachers, Arthur Jersild (1955) was among the first of modern-day educators to focus attention on the connection between teachers' personal lives and their professional effectiveness. Jersild maintained that understanding yourself is the single most important task in the growth toward developing healthy attitudes of self-acceptance. The basic idea is that to help others, you must be intimately aware of your own strengths and limitations so that you can present yourself in ways that are optimally effective.

The influence of Jersild's little book was short-lived. Soon after it was published, Sputnik, the first space vehicle, was launched by the Soviet Union. The United States began a frenzied focus not on teachers' needs, but on the perceived national security imperative to train teachers of scientists and technicians. The human dimensions of teaching were considered too soft to be of great priority.

In the 1960s, during the brief moments of "The Great Society" and its relevance in education, writers and researchers began to pay more attention to the human aspects of teaching and learning. Carl Rogers (1939, 1969a, 1980), a strong voice for a focus on self in teacher education, wrote extensively about the need for teachers to be process oriented rather than exclusively content oriented in their approach. This means spending time in the class discussing not only the poems of Emily Dickinson, the location of national capitals, or

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the nervous system, but also how children feel about these subjects, about themselves in relation to their learning, and about one another as they continue the dialogue. According to Rogers, teachers must spend considerable time and effort building positive relationships with children, allowing their authenticity, genuineness, and caring to shine through. When these human dimensions are cultivated, a teacher can genuinely act as a “person, not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement, or a sterile pipe through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next” (Rogers, 1969b, p. 107).

As the 1960s came to an end, there began a gradual and continuing shift toward the technology of teaching, as championed by B. F. Skinner and the behaviorists. In opposition to the view of Rogers, Skinner asserted that teachers fail not because of any human limitations, but because they are not prepared to manage student behaviors (Skinner, 1969, p. 167). Many useful research efforts soon followed to develop a technology of classroom behavior management, although a side effect of this effort was that the more human aspects of education were criticized as imprecise and unnecessary.

One singular exception to this neglect of the human dimensions of education in the 1970s was presented by Angelo Boy and Gerald Pine (1971) in their book on the personal growth of teachers. They were convinced that continuous, balanced development in human, vocational, spiritual, and recreational areas was essential for all teachers to thrive in their work and lives. They also made the compelling point that the goal of education is not to teach subject matter but to promote the development of productive and positive human beings. They contended that the teacher must be well adjusted and well prepared professionally in order to nurture these qualities in others.

With the advent of the 1980s, the accountability measures of Reaganomics, and the plethora of “nation-at-risk” types of reports, attention was further drawn away from a focus on growing teachers as human beings as well as professionals. Several other phenomena during the 1980s also contributed to the failure to focus on the human aspects of our profession. The first was a conservative religious response to anything in education that could even be remotely associated with *secular humanism*, a philosophy that emphasized freedom and permissiveness. Many teacher educators who believed in building a solid professional base on a strong, mature human foundation were fearful of being branded secular humanists.

The “Yuppie” phenomenon was a second factor that prevented others from focusing on the human dimension of teaching, due to the selfish, materialistic fascination of the “me generation.” Finally, the popularity of the so-called effective schools movement riveted the attention of North American educators on classroom climate, academic expectations, administrative leadership, and high test scores. There was little room in the effective schools model for consideration of human dimensions of teaching and learning, which were thought to be tangential.

The 1980s were years of great promise, but with little personal or professional payoff for teachers. During this nerve-wracking decade for education, there were many books and articles written about reducing stress and avoiding burnout (as examples, see Humphrey & Humphrey, 1986; Swick, 1985). There were, however, few systematic attempts to aid understanding and strategies for cultivating the human dimension of teachers.

The 1990s provided a more fertile field for attending to the human aspects of what it means to be a teacher. There were several signals indicative of a grassroots readiness and demand for attention to the human side of the educational endeavor. The call for restructuring and reform in education was based on the shared convictions of teachers and administrators that unless educators were empowered to shape the personal and professional dimensions of the educational enterprise, there would be no durable reform of education.

This decade also placed an emphasis on multicultural education (see Campbell & Delgado-Campbell, 2000; Hernandez, 2000; Manning & Baruth, 1999; Noel, 1999) and constructivist teaching (see Henderson, 1996; Mintzes, Wandersee, & Novak, 1998; Selley, 1999). These unusually “human” dimensions of learning represented a significant expansion of humanistic philosophy in that rather than stressing individual perceptions, they adopted a “postmodern” view of learning as influenced and shaped by one’s culture and language.

Many of the hoped-for reforms of the 1990s, including site-based management of schools, empowerment of teachers, charter schools, revitalization of inner-city schools, bilingual learning for all students, national performance standards, accelerated learning programs, and a number of other national and local initiatives to improve education, produced limited degrees of success. The 1990s were so mired in divisive partisan political battles that the needs of teachers went largely ignored.

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Currently, under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the focus of education is on stronger school accountability as measured by annual testing of student achievement (Goldberg, 2004). States are required to administer standards-based reading and mathematics assessments in grades 3 through 8 and at one grade level 10 through 12 during the 2005–2006 school year, adding science assessments during 2007–2008 at least once at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Additionally, schools must raise student achievement levels to meet annual objectives so that students will meet set levels of proficiency or face a series of consequences and disaggregate the data by student subgroups to track achievement for all students in order to close achievement gaps. Progress is reported in annual school report cards, and results serve as the basis for determining promotion, graduation, financing, and school governance. As a consequence of these high stakes tests, teachers today are learning to use data-driven analysis of test scores to design their lessons to make sure students meet or exceed the standards on which their students will be tested. Perhaps lost in the focus on accountability are the human dimensions of teaching.

There is no doubt that this is a complicated law. Yell and Drasgow (2005) note that although NCLB increases the amount of federal funding by 25%, it increases the role of the federal government in education with its mandates for states, school districts, schools, and teachers. The main implications of these measures for teachers are in the need for expertise in raising student achievement in “(a) developing and using progress monitoring and data collection systems, and (b) matching instruction programs and strategies to students’ progress” (Yell & Drasgow, 2005, p. 117).

The pressures teachers face under “test-based accountability policies” are resulting in a narrowing of information and educational experience for students (Goldberg, 2004; Pedulla, 2003). It is no surprise that “Teachers are spending a sizable amount of instructional time to prepare students for state tests.” (Abrams & Madaus, 2003, p. 35). They develop and administer pre-tests and post-tests for units of study and quarterly benchmark tests to track the progress or lack of progress of their students and deliver remediation as needed. It is not uncommon for schools to offer a second period in a given subject, for example, math, to provide students with additional support.

With respect to student relationships, in the March 2003 issue of *Educational Leadership*, published by the Association for

Supervision and Curriculum Development, which notably devoted the issue to creating caring schools, Schaps (2003) states “Community building should become—at a minimum—a strong complement to the prevailing focus on academic achievement.” Schaps notes that “. . . the evidence for the importance of building caring school communities is clear and compelling” (Schaps 2003, p. 33). Additionally, Bryk and Schneider (2003) review the literature that supports building relational trust as the link bringing individuals together as a source of school reform. “Distinct role relationships characterize the social exchanges of schooling: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents, and all groups with the school principal” (Bryk and Schneider, 2003, p. 41). Schools with daily productive exchanges in a safe and secure environment that recognize respect, personal regard, individual responsibility, and personal integrity are more likely to have improvements in student achievement.

In spite of the limited successes in the past and the challenges of high-stakes testing today, we remain optimistic that we are entering a more enlightened age that more genuinely attends to the preparation of the whole teacher. It seems clear, not only from our own experience, but from others’ as well, that being a teacher involves a special blend of personal dimensions combined with technical and instructional expertise. What you do is certainly important, but so is who you are.

## ATTRIBUTES OF A GREAT TEACHER

There may be considerable debate among educational theoreticians and practitioners about the optimal curriculum, the most appropriate philosophy of teaching for today’s schools, the best methods of instruction and strategies for discipline, but there is a reasonable consensus about what makes a teacher great, even if these characteristics are uniquely expressed.

Take a minute away from your reading and reflect on how you ended up where you are right now. What inspired you, or rather *who* inspired you, to consider teaching as a profession? It is likely that you had both negative and positive models—those who struck you as absolutely hopeless as teachers, as well as those who were true masters. If you are like most of us, you are taking this course of



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study right now because one or more of your own teachers had certain attributes that you greatly admired. In fact, you so envied their lives and work that you are now following in their footsteps.

On your personal list—on almost anyone's agenda—is a collection of those human characteristics that are common to the best teachers. These are the attributes that regardless of subject area, instructional methods, and educational assignment, supply the energy behind the ability to influence others in constructive ways. The extent to which you can work to develop these same human dimensions in yourself will determine how effective you will be as a mentor to others and how satisfied you will feel with your choice to be, or to continue to be, part of this profession.

As we review the personal and professional dimensions of what makes teachers great, we are not so much encouraging you to compare yourself to this ideal as we are suggesting that you take inventory of your personal functioning to assess your own strengths and weaknesses. Such an honest self-examination can help you to identify unexpressed potential that is lying dormant in you—reserves of positive energy just waiting for you to activate them.

Take comfort in the reality that there are really many ways that a teacher can capitalize on personal dimensions to help and inspire others. You have witnessed extraordinary instructors who were loud and dramatic and others who were soft and understated. You have had great teachers who were kind and supportive and others who were stern and demanding. You have enjoyed the benefits of working with teachers who were great speakers; others who were captivating one-on-one; and still others who excelled in small, informal groups. You have known wonderful teachers who may, at first, seem to be quite different in their style and personality, yet what they all had in common is that they found ways to maximize their personal strengths. With considerable reflection and some preparation, you can do the same thing.

The decision to be, or to continue to be, a teacher is one with far-reaching consequences. You have committed yourself not only to a lifestyle in which you must become an expert in your field, but also to one in which you have tremendous incentives to be the most well adjusted, fully functioning, and satisfied human being you can possibly be. What exactly does that involve? Return to your own experiences with the best teachers you ever had. Think again about their personal characteristics that you believe made the most difference to



you. Compare these attributes with those in the following paragraphs. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather a sampling of what many people mention as most significant. As you review these qualities, consider the extent to which you are working to develop them more in yourself.

## Charisma

Since the beginning of human time, those who were tapped for the calling of teacher, whether as priests, professors, or poets, were those who had developed the capacity to inspire others. They emanated a personality force that others found attractive, compelling, even seductive in the sense that there was a strong desire to know more about and from them. In the words of the novelist and former teacher Pat Conroy (1982), charisma in teachers occurs when they allow their personality to shine through their subject matter:

I developed the Great Teacher Theory late in my freshman year. It was a cornerstone of the theory that great teachers had great personalities and that the greatest teachers had outrageous personalities. I did not like decorum or rectitude in a classroom; I preferred a highly oxygenated atmosphere, a climate of intemperance, rhetoric, and feverish melodrama. And I wanted my teachers to make me smart. A great teacher is my adversary, my conqueror, commissioned to chastise me. He leaves me tame and grateful for the new language he has purloined from other Kings whose granaries are famous. He tells me that teaching is the art of theft: of knowing what to steal and from whom. (p. 271)

Scholars may argue as to whether qualities such as charisma are ingrained or can be learned. We would prefer to sidestep that debate and suggest that all those who have devoted their lives to the service of others can increase charismatic powers and thereby command attention in the classroom. This is true whether your inclination is to be dramatic or low key in your presentations, loud or soft. Charisma, after all, can be displayed in so many different ways, depending on your personal style, not to mention what your students respond to best. It involves gaining access to your own unique assets as a human being, which allows you to find a voice that is authentic, compelling, and captivating.

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Randi, for example, is not the kind of person one would ordinarily describe as “magnetic.” She is typically quiet and soft-spoken, usually content to hang out on the perimeter of most discussions that take place at parties or in the teachers’ lounge. That is not to say that she is not thoughtful and articulate; it is just that she prefers to express herself with restraint, at least when she is around other adults. What most of Randi’s friends and family would be surprised to discover is how different she can be behind the closed door of her classroom.

Randi realized long ago that although it is her natural inclination to be somewhat muted, even passive, in her daily interactions, there is no way she could ever control a group of children, much less keep their attention, unless she could learn to gain access to the charismatic part of her personality that she usually kept under wraps. She knew that it was not within her means, or part of her style, to be irreverent, humorous, or dramatic the way some of her colleagues chose to entertain and interest their students. No, the one thing in life that Randi felt passionate about, in her own quiet way, was the beauty and elegance of numbers. As a math teacher, she knew that very few other people (and especially few students) felt the way she did about algebraic equations or geometric theorems. But she believed that if somehow she could communicate to her classes in a natural, authentic way her enthusiasm and excitement about mathematics, maybe some of the energy would become contagious.

Her students would sometimes notice how their usually reserved teacher seemed to come alive at certain times. Her eyes would become electric, her face would become animated. She would start pacing. Her arms would almost vibrate. Her voice would rise not so much in volume as in pitch. She became so caught up in what she was explaining, it was almost impossible not to look at her. Even with little interest in the subject or no understanding of what she was talking about, students could not help but watch her in action. It is so rare, after all, to come in contact with people who absolutely love what they do and are able to communicate this passion with abandon.

The transformation that would take place in Randi once she was in front of her classes (not all the time, not even most of the time, but enough to keep the students’ attention) was, indeed, a form of charisma. She was able to use not so much her compelling personality as her passion for what she was teaching to empower her presentations. Some students could not help but wonder to themselves,

“Hey, if this quiet lady can get so worked up over these stupid numbers, maybe there is something there that I’m missing.” Others would say to themselves, “I don’t much care for this subject, but it sure is fun to watch her in action: It makes me want to learn this stuff.”

Charisma, in whatever form it manifests itself, works to command other people’s interest in what we are doing. It is not necessary to be an actor or an exhibitionist or to have a florid personality to be charismatic; but it is absolutely crucial to feel passionately about what you are doing and to be able to convey this enthusiasm to others.

### Compassion

Children, and for that matter all other living creatures, appreciate people who are genuinely caring and loving toward them. This is why the best teachers are so much more than experts in their fields and more than interesting personalities—they are individuals whom children can trust, they are adults who are perceived as safe and kind and caring. Even when they are in a bad mood, give difficult assignments, or have to teach units that are relatively boring, compassionate teachers will get the benefit of the doubt from students.

When you think again about your greatest teachers, who may not necessarily have seemed like the kindest people, you still had little doubt that they had your best interests at heart. They may have pushed you, may even have shoved you hard, but you knew in your heart that they cared deeply about you as a person. You felt their respect and, yes, sometimes their love.

Very few people go into education in the first place to become rich or famous. On some level, every teacher gets a special thrill out of helping others; unfortunately, after many years in the classroom, some veterans lose the idealism that originally motivated them to be professional helpers. Yet, the teachers who flourish, those who are loved by their students and revered by their colleagues, are those who feel tremendous dedication and concern for others—not just because they are paid to do so, but because it is their nature and their ethical responsibility.

There are few rushes in life more pleasurable and fulfilling than the act of helping another human being. Some time ago, I (J. K.) was walking down the street when I came upon a group of children

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waiting for their school bus. Two kids, a little boy and girl of about 6 or 7 years, seemed to be involved in a tussle. As I drew closer, the girl pushed the boy down on the sidewalk, his backpack fell open, and his papers started blowing away. I reached down to retrieve the papers, helped the little boy up, and asked him if he was all right. He blinked away his tears and smiled up at me as if I were an angel. As I continued on my walk, I looked over my shoulder and saw the little boy still staring with wonder at this stranger who had rescued him.

This incident, so perfectly ordinary, seemed to transform my whole spirit. I felt so good inside I could barely restrain myself from breaking out into a whoop of exhilaration. I had helped someone who needed me. In my own tiny way, in those few seconds, I made the world a better place.

In fact, this altruistic spirit, this urge to “do good” for others, is what motivates most of us to do this sort of work (Kottler, 2000). We are driven by the desire, maybe even the need, to leave the world, or at least our little part of it, better off than before we arrived on the scene. In a sense, we become immortal in that we remain alive as long as there are others walking around this planet who were directly or indirectly helped by our compassionate efforts (Blacker, 1997).

We remember vividly the exhilaration that we have felt, and that other teachers describe, when we *know* we have made a difference in someone’s life. It can involve explaining an idea that a child has never understood before. It can mean offering a smile, a hug, or a word of encouragement to someone who is suffering. It often involves reaching out in the most ordinary of circumstances to touch someone with our concern and caring. It does not take place only when we are “on duty” in the classroom. Some of the most helpful things that a teacher can ever say to a child take place in more informal settings—in the hallways, on the playground, in the lunchroom—during those times when compassion can be expressed most genuinely (Hazler, 1998).

This compassionate empathy operates not only between parents and children, between therapists and their clients, but also, most assuredly, between teachers and students. It is, in fact, the glue that binds together everything that we do in education. For unless students sense that we really value them and respect them (even as we disapprove strongly of certain ways that they may behave), there is no way that they will ever trust us and open themselves up to hear what we have to say.

You only need to examine your own significant learning experiences to understand the crucial importance that compassion plays in education. Bring to mind, once again, those teachers who have made the most difference in your life, whether a relative, a coach, a professor, a teacher, or whoever. We suggest that beyond the content of what they passed on to you, apart from their formal lessons of instruction, what you appreciated most was what genuinely caring individuals they were. They really cared about your welfare. You trusted them and learned from them because you knew they cared. Actually, that is the foundation of self-esteem; it is based on the regard that others have invested in you. How else can children learn to care about themselves and others if they do not feel such compassion and love from you, their teacher?

If you review what you believe children should receive as a result of their educational experiences, number one on your list (or certainly in the top three) would be developing a sense of self-esteem. It is from this basic attitude toward self that all confidence, competence, and life satisfaction emanates—not only during the school years but throughout a lifetime.

What is it that fosters self-esteem in children? What is it that helps young people to feel good about themselves? Among several other variables, such as mastering age-appropriate developmental tasks, developing competence in life skills, and belonging to a supportive peer group, is receiving lots of support and caring from adult mentors. It is from this position of dedicated, consistent, and compassionate caring that the effective teacher is able to set limits, create and enforce rules, establish effective classroom routines, provide discipline when it is needed—and be able to do so without risk of losing children's respect in the process.

### **Egalitarianism**

Good teachers are certainly not mushy pushovers. Yes, they are compassionate, sometimes even permissive, but they recognize that children need and even crave having the teacher set limits. It is not so much that students despise discipline in the classroom, but rather that they will not abide rules that are unfair or that are applied indiscriminately. It is even safe to say that what children complain about the most in school are those teachers who they perceive as biased or inequitable in the ways they enforce rules. As one 10-year-old explains,

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She is just so mean I hate her. You never know what to expect. There is this one girl who can get away with anything. She whispers or passes notes and Mrs. \_\_\_ just tells her to “please be quiet.” But if the other kids in the class are caught doing the same thing, then she punishes them. The other day she wouldn’t let anybody go outside for recess just because a few kids were making a disturbance. I wasn’t even talking, but I had to stay inside, too. I just hate her.

If we consider modeling human qualities to be an important part of the teacher’s role, then certainly demonstrating our own sense of fairness is crucial to helping children evolve their moral thinking. We cannot forget that teaching is an intrinsically moral act. As Weissbourd (2003) says, the moral development of students depends on the adults in their lives. How are children supposed to learn moral values, such as treating others with respect and fairness, unless they see their teachers practicing these behaviors on a daily basis?

Imagine, for example, a situation in which no matter what the teacher does on a particular day, the class is unruly and unresponsive. Cajoling, pleading, threatening, yelling, reasoning, distracting are all met with stony student resistance. The teacher knows that some decisive action is indicated, but cannot think of what it might be. From among the on the available choices, the following options are considered:

1. Pick out the ringleaders of the class disturbances and administer after school detention.
2. Announce to the class that all members are responsible not only for their own behavior but also for that of their peers. Unless the disturbances cease immediately, *they* will all suffer the same consequences regardless of their relative contributions to the problem.
3. Select the few members of the class who have been visibly identified engaging in the disruptive behavior and subject them to some form of punishment.

As is so often true in any of the behavioral sciences, determining the best and fairest solution to this problem is a judgment call. There is probably no way to predict with certainty that any of the

above options is the right one, and that the others are assuredly wrong.

What is at issue here for the egalitarian teacher is not so much the action taken, but the particular way in which it is accomplished. During the moment of decision, when the teacher is immersed in the fray of classroom conflict, when confusion and frustration prevail, there is simply no time to reason through what will definitely work and what probably will not. Much of the time, the teacher is acting on instinct and experience.

It is not only unreasonable, but even impossible, for students to expect that any teacher will demonstrate perfect equity in all situations and circumstances. What children (and all of us) appreciate is the effort on the part of authority figures to do their best to understand what is going on and try to resolve the conflict with relative impartiality and objectivity. For example, after a heated exchange or conflict, the teacher has an excellent opportunity to discuss with students the process of what took place, how things got out of control, and how situations could be handled differently in the future (such reflective thinking is discussed further in a later chapter). The egalitarian teacher is not necessarily unbiased and just all of the time, but strives to be as fair as humanly possible in situations that are often impossible. Where rules are necessary, the egalitarian teaches the rules rather than simply dictating them (Jones, 1987; Powell, McLaughlin, Savage, & Zehm, 1999).

### **Working With Diverse Students**

At the same time, teachers must address the differences in the diverse abilities of the students in their classrooms. Children with special needs require modifications of curriculum and adaptations in the classroom in order to be successful. For example, a teacher may have a student with a physical disability, a sensory impairment, learning disability, attention deficit disorder, or emotional disturbances, each requiring special attention. There will be different academic and behavioral expectations for these students according to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The abilities of gifted and talented students present another set of challenges (Kottler et al., 2004).

Effective teachers will implement different strategies, groupings, and assessments so that each can be successful. They differentiate the curriculum, the learning activities, and how student progress



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will be measured and then determine the instructional design. Students may access material through different means, such as listening to a CD, watching a DVD, or reading text. They may work individually, with a partner or in a small group or as a whole class. Finally, they may be assessed through a traditional pencil and paper test or through a form of alternative assessment, such as a product or performance. Additionally, Willard-Holt (2003) suggests curriculum compacting, tiered assignments, and multilevel learning stations will challenge all students. "Thus, students can use a variety of approaches to gain access to the curriculum, make sense of their learning, and show what they have learned" (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p. 23). In this way, all students have access to the curriculum ensuring equity. Students recognize they are all treated fairly, although not the same.

### Gender Issues

The last point we want to mention relates to gender in the classroom. Research in the 1990s reported by the American Association of University Women revealed that classroom teachers treated boys and girls differently, with boys receiving more attention from teachers. Ryan and Cooper (2004) describe that boys have higher levels of participation than girls. "Boys are more likely to call out, and when they do, teachers are apt to accept the call out and continue with the class. When girls call out, a much less frequent occurrence, the teacher's typical response is to correct the inappropriate behavior" (Ryan & Cooper, 2004, p. 99). They note boys receive more criticism, praise, and feedback than girls. There are also differences in the quantity and types of advanced classes boys take when compared to girls.

While noting research reports show improvements in recent years, Ryan and Cooper suggest several measures for teachers, such as taking into account all learning styles (see Chapter 2), being aware of your interactions with your students, selecting materials that are not gender biased, choosing groups rather than letting students self select with whom they will work, and making sure all students have opportunities to participate. Calling on students rather than letting them call out answers will help to ensure fairness. Many teachers use a monitoring system, such as names on index cards drawn from a stack or names on popsicle sticks picked from a can.

Students may not comment, but they are very much aware of who participates in class and how much, as well as who is commended and how for their work. Encourage and praise all students for their work. Teachers must attend to all the students in their classes and be sensitive to how they respond to each situation from behavioral, academic, instructional, and gender perspectives.

### Sense of Humor

If there is one major premise of effective teaching, it is conveying the idea that learning is enjoyable. When students are bored or uninterested, when their attention is diverted toward internal fantasies or external distractions, little learning takes place. In the marketplace of life, we are competing with a variety of other stimuli that are vying for children's attention. While sitting in the classroom, a student may be distracted by unbridled pangs of hunger, longing for peer acceptance, or lust. Compared to the worries, heartbreaks, and interests in their lives, the absolute last thing in the world that many students care about is what you are doing in class. Think about it: When children are upset about their parents fighting, or distraught because a best friend was mean, or worried about getting a part in the school play, or excited about an upcoming tennis match, just how important do *you* think whatever you are teaching is.

One principle that is crucial to keep in mind, maybe the single most important concept of education, is that nothing that is taking place in the classroom is as important to children as what they are constructing inside their own internal worlds. Ask children what they would prefer to be doing with their time, and it is likely you will get a long list of possibilities—riding bikes, talking to friends, skateboarding, eating ice cream, trading baseball cards, watching television, going to the beach, sleeping late—but quite far down on the list would be the choice, “If I could be doing anything right now, I would like to be in school, right here in *your* class.”

It is our job, therefore, not only to teach children, but first to interest them in learning. A sense of humor and playfulness are among the most powerful tools available to teachers to help accomplish this mission. It is one of the ways teachers can connect with students (Wolk, 2003). Play, after all, is the language of children. It is through laughter that we all feel most enraptured, most alive, most connected to what is happening around us.

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One of the most challenging teaching assignments that I (J. K.) ever faced included a group of a dozen preschoolers, ages 3 to 4 years. From the looks of their behavior, they did not appear to know the first thing about such ideas as cooperation, sharing, taking turns, or being considerate about others' feelings. I was informed that it was my job to teach them basic social skills (in addition to such life skills as mastering the use of scissors). The hardest part of my task, I soon discovered, was simply commanding their attention for long enough to teach them anything.

None of the usual things I had tried worked very well. I tried being polite (they ignored me). I switched to being unduly firm (they became afraid of me). Yet, the one thing these little people taught me that I have never forgotten is that if I could get them to laugh, they would follow me anywhere. I became so unpredictably silly in their minds, prone to do almost anything at any moment, that they were afraid if they turned their attention away for very long, they might miss something really good.

This practice of capitalizing on humor has served me well in a variety of settings. One of my teaching assignments was working with cadets at a military academy. These young men, though bright and motivated, would drag into class so utterly exhausted in the morning that they would stand up in the back of the room to avoid falling asleep (and some of them even taught themselves to sleep standing up) often worn out from the exercise regimen they began every morning at 5 a.m. after staying up all night studying.

This situation may not be that far from the one that will face you. Many children are deprived of the sleep they need to function attentively at school. They may have stayed up watching television, playing video games, talking on the phone, or surfing the Internet. They may have maintained an all-night vigil over a sick or dying pet. They may have lain awake all night as their parents battled and quarreled. They may have been up late to finish a project due that day. Whatever the cause, it is every teacher's nightmare to have to capture the attention of students who are undergoing sleep deprivation. Yet, this is the training ground for making superlative instructors. If you can keep these people awake, much less teach them anything, you are indeed in the ranks of the best.

We are not suggesting that teaching and learning are as simple as fun and games. What valuing humor means for the teacher, however, is making a commitment to appreciating the sublime, silly,

playful aspects of life. It means spending as much time and attention trying to be interesting and relevant to students' needs as it does preparing the content of what we have to teach. It means acknowledging what is funny, and that funny things happen in the classroom. It also means cultivating the children's own appreciation for humor. And, yes, when appropriate, use games in the classroom. Erwin (2003) identifies review games, drama games, brain teasers, and adventure-based learning as ways to building relationships.

We promise you: If you do not encourage humor and play in class, the students will do it for you. That is the purpose of the "class clown," after all, as comedians like George Carlin and Bill Cosby have so humorously testified. When teachers fail to make learning fun, when they fail to demonstrate a sense of humor, they make for ripe targets by those creative, mischievous kids who see their job in life as helping others to have as much fun as possible.

Of the personal dimensions of teaching, humor is the most human of all. Teachers who value humor, who not only tolerate laughter and fun in their classrooms but even invite them in and encourage them to stay, are perceived by students as being more interesting and relevant than those who appear grim and humorless. A sense of humor encourages a teacher to take advantage of those "teachable moments" that serendipitously come to all classrooms. Your sense of humor will communicate to your students that you are creative, witty, subtle, and fun loving. Who else would students pay attention to and respect?

### **Additional Desirable Traits**

The best teachers access not just what is in their heads but also what is in their hearts. They are both logical and intuitive. They are responsive both to what they observe on the outside and to what they sense on the inside. In the words of Parker Palmer (1998), "We teach who we are: I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the job. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illuminated by the lightning-life of the mind—then teaching is the finest work I know" (p. 1).

In their study of "legendary" teachers, Scheidecker and Freeman (1999) asked adults to reflect on their experiences in school and

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describe the characteristics of their very best teachers. It would be simple enough for you to replicate this research by doing your own interviews. In addition to the several qualities we have mentioned, you would likely discover that the following characteristics are described most frequently. As you go through this list, think about where you stand in each of these human dimensions:

- *Smarts.* This means you know stuff. You understand things that children want to know. You are perceived as being intelligent not just in “book smarts” but also in “street smarts.” You are respected because of your wisdom. Children gravitate toward you because they believe that you know things that are important.
- *Creativity.* You keep students on their toes. You are unpredictable at times, playful and spontaneous. You are able to demonstrate in your own life the sort of creative spirit that you want your students to develop. Rather than overemphasizing “right” answers, you are also interested in promoting their creative behavior, especially the sort that is not disruptive and is “on task.”
- *Honesty.* You can be trusted. You are not afraid to say, “I don’t know,” or “I’m wrong,” or “I made a mistake.” You model the sort of openness, transparency, and authenticity that encourage others to do the same.
- *Emotional stability.* You are relatively calm. You are not prone to the sort of mood swings or temper tantrums that make children fearful. During those times you become upset, you are able to restrain yourself so you do not lash out at kids. When you do lose control, you do what you can to make things right. You apologize. You accept responsibility for your lapse. You do not blame others. You get help for yourself. Most important, you learn from the experience so you do not do it again.
- *Patience.* Some of the worst teachers are those who are instructing in subjects that came very easy to them. It all seems so simple, and they cannot understand why others have so much trouble. Likewise, when you personally have struggled mightily to master a subject, you can more easily appreciate what others are going through. Patience often comes from this empathic understanding of what is involved in tackling what is perceived as a difficult subject. Time and time

again, students mention how important it is for their teachers to be patient with them. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of increasing “wait time” before calling on a student for an answer, of giving students a pause to reflect on what they have learned, and time to make mistakes from which they can progress.

- *Ability to challenge and motivate.* This is a complex characteristic because, on the one hand, you want to motivate students to go as far as they can but, on the other hand, you do not want to overwhelm or discourage them. If you are perceived as having both high standards and a certain flexibility, students will work hard for you, knowing that you will not compare them to others but consider their unique background and capabilities.
- *Novelty.* Another way to describe this characteristic is “differentness.” Almost everyone enjoys learning experiences that are not the same as what they are used to, within certain limits. Memorable teachers seem to be those who have certain eccentricities, unique qualities, and personal idiosyncrasies that were perceived as “endearing” rather than “annoying.” They also try different instructional strategies and are not afraid to take reasonable risks with new approaches.
- *Interest in students.* The revered teachers are the ones who show a genuine interest in their students. They show their school spirit by wearing school colors and participating in school events, attending assemblies, and participating in fundraising. They engage their students in conversations about their lives outside of school. They not only talk about forthcoming school and community events, they attend football games, concerts, the spring play, debates, and dances. They meet students at the door and compliment them on their extracurricular achievements. They are available before and after school to help students with homework for any class, talk about the future opportunities, and just listen to what is on their minds. They draw students’ interests into their lessons showing not only that they have heard what has been said, but that it was relevant and meaningful.

In addition, the best teachers (a) are well organized and good managers, (b) hold high expectations for themselves and others, (c) are thoughtful in that they prevent classroom and discipline

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problems before they begin, (d) are accessible and easily approachable, and (e) are warm and empathic (Kleiner, 1998). Being a teacher means being an interesting person, someone who is wise and approachable and personally attractive.

### **BEING PERSONALLY EFFECTIVE**

The paradox of being a great teacher is that one must be perceived not only as someone who is playful but also as someone who is efficient enough to get the job done. The job is the business of learning, which if done properly has its own intrinsic rewards. Everyone enjoys the thrill of mastering a new skill or understanding a new concept.

For teachers to be effective in the classroom, as in the world outside of school, it is necessary for them to work at being reasonably well adjusted human beings. Teachers who are ineffectual, wimpy, or whiny, who are perceived as weak and ineffective in their basic style of interaction, earn little respect from students or from their peers. Likewise, those teachers who appear to be in charge of their own lives, who radiate power, tranquility, and grace in their actions, are going to command attention and respect. Their students will follow them anywhere.

What we are saying is that you have not only the option but the imperative to develop the human dimensions of your personal functioning, as well as your professional skills. Teachers are, after all, professional communicators. We relate to others for a living. We introduce people to new ideas. We help students to build their self-esteem and confidence. We develop relationships with people to influence them in positive ways. How are we ever going to do these things unless the children we teach are attracted to us and like us as human beings?

The best teachers are those who have worked hard both to develop themselves as experts in their fields and to practice what they know and understand in their own personal lives. They are relatively free of negative emotions, and when they do become upset they have the skills to regain control. Perhaps most of all, such teachers attempt to live the ideals that they espouse to others. If they preach to others the importance of truth, honesty, self-discipline, knowledge, growth, taking constructive risks, then they practice



these same values in their own lives. They become living examples for their students, showing that what they say is important enough for them to apply to their own lives. They are attractive models who advertise, by their very being, that learning does produce wondrous results.

Perhaps there are other attributes that you consider to be even more important than the teacher qualities we have identified in this chapter. These may be character traits, skills, values, cultural beliefs, or knowledge that you consider absolutely crucial to teachers who plan on making a difference in children's lives. Whatever choices you would select as being among your highest priorities to develop in yourself, the goal must remain to make yourself not only an accomplished professional but also the most effective human being you can be.

Your responsibility, then, involves so much more than presenting course content or making sure your students score high on achievement tests. The human dimensions of teaching come together in your commitment to make teaching much more than a job. Being a teacher is a way of life. You are a teacher not only when you stand in front of your classroom, but also as you walk through life, applying what you know and understand and can do.

## **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

1. Interview students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to see who their favorite teachers are and why. Compare their answers to find common qualities.
2. Discuss with others the roles teachers have played in your lives.
3. Shadow a teacher for a day to note the variety of interactions encountered with other people. Discuss with that teacher, if possible, how the movement for standards and accountability is impacting the human dimension of teaching.
4. Read more about No Child Left Behind on the U.S. Department of Education Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>