

Examining 5 overlooked qualities of a good teacher



When you think about best teachers you've had in your life, there are likely a handful of fundamental traits they had in common. These instructors were probably adept at classroom instruction and verbal communication. Perhaps they were also organized, creative and great listeners.

We've come to expect these competencies from the educators in our lives. But when it comes to the truly outstanding teachers — the ones who go above and beyond to make lasting impacts on each of their students — what is it that sets them apart?

We collected a group of seasoned education professionals to glean their insights on some unexpected characteristics of a good teacher. See if their wisdom can help inform your own career as an educator.

5 of the best teacher qualities you might not know about

Every instructor is different, but the most impactful ones often share some

similar traits. Keep reading to discover if you possess some of the common qualities of a great teacher.

1. They promote a growth mindset

The ways we learn to confront challenges when we're young can have an important impact on the way we view obstacles as adults. Psychologist and researcher Dr. Carol Dweck wrote [a book on the concept](#) that explains people develop either a "growth mindset" or a "fixed mindset" in their youth.

According to Dr. Dweck, those who shrink in the face of challenges have a [fixed mindset](#) and may view intelligence, creativity and personality as elements that are set in stone at birth. For this reason, simply encountering obstacles can be enough to convince people with a fixed mindset that they're incapable of overcoming them.

The best educators help foster a [growth mindset](#). Students with growth mindsets view the same elements (intelligence, creativity and personality) as characteristics that can be cultivated over time. As such, they don't see failure as an option. They perceive obstacles as opportunities to improve and learn — they may even pursue challenges and become more engaged when facing them.

2. They're able to meet students where they are

Every student is different, and teachers need to accommodate that. This is something Steve Sonntag, part-time teacher at [Connecting Waters Charter School](#) and Spanish and English tutor for Wyzant, feels strongly about.

In addition to fundamentals like continually encouraging students and praising them regularly for accomplishments, Sonntag emphasizes the importance of teaching to different levels within the same classroom. He

explains that effective teachers will understand that students naturally learn at variable paces and that being flexible is key.

“Teachers need to be patient because all students don’t necessarily learn as quickly the first time they are introduced to new information,” Sonntag explains.

3. They understand the importance of cross-curricular teaching

When it comes to effective teaching, University of Massachusetts Global professor of education [Dr. Kimberly Greene](#) warns against the natural tendency many of us have to silo different subjects. She says viewing everything students need to learn as separate, unrelated disciplines is counterintuitive to how things actually work in the real world. And great teachers realize this.

Dr. Greene believes cross-curricular teaching to be among the best teacher qualities — especially with young students. She explains that “Developmentally, young children are constantly trying to make sense of the world around them.” Dr. Green goes on to say,

By infusing any particular topic of study with another, we give students a greater opportunity to make genuine connections to their authentically lived experiences.

[Cross-curricular instruction](#) draws upon content and skills from numerous areas to create one cohesive learning experience. This can help students learn how to connect what they know with what they are learning, a skill that has become increasingly important.

In fact, cross-curricular instruction is at the center of the [Common Core](#)

[State Standards](#) for teaching — a set of high-quality academic standards that education programs like [the ones at University of Massachusetts Global](#) align their goals to. According to Dr. Greene, “Math and history and science and literature are all a beautiful combination of each other. This leads us into the unmitigated value of cross-curricular learning.”

4. They're committed to lifelong learning

Learning how to be a good teacher is a lifelong commitment. “When teachers improve upon their practice with new knowledge and skills based upon best practices, student achievement will inevitably increase,” offers [Erica Leahy](#), director of K-12 programs at University of Massachusetts Global’s [School of Extended Education](#). She adds that continued education helps teachers mitigate the barriers and challenges that students face and creates an environment that supports all learning styles.

[Professional-development](#) options for educators could include attending a workshop or seminar, pursuing additional certifications, and enrolling in a degree program. Leahy advises, “Gaining new skills and understanding is important — but so is the reflection side of it.”

In your pursuit of continual improvement, it may be helpful to invite a peer or a mentor to observe you and offer suggestions. “The teachers who stand out to me are the ones who are willing to say, ‘I still have work to do. I still have something to learn,’” Leahy offers. “If a teacher is in discovery mode, it can be contagious.”

5. They have a future-forward outlook

Ample time spent in the education industry has enabled [Dr. Keith Larick](#), chair of University of Massachusetts Global’s [Doctor of Education \(Ed.D\) in](#)

[Organizational Leadership program](#), to zoom out and examine the bigger picture of education. “We have been making incredibly slow, frustrating progress,” he says of the industry at large. “Things we were doing 15 years ago still haven’t bubbled up as general practices. We’re still tied to the textbook.”

His forward-thinking mindset is one reason Dr. Larick has played such a pivotal role in the design of the Ed.D. program at University of Massachusetts Global. Technology, for example, is something he feels should be incorporated heavily in every school, district, college and university. This is true even for students entering kindergarten.

“For them, the written word is too slow,” Dr. Larick explains. “That drives the structure that should go on in classrooms.”

What kind of teacher do you want to be?

Now that you’re familiar with some of the overlooked — but still essential — qualities of a great teacher, take some time to reflect on your own strengths, interests and skills that could be honed. These are important things to ask yourself on your journey to becoming an educator.

As you evaluate what type of teacher you’d like to become, you’ll need to start researching degree programs and useful certification options. Teaching credential specifications vary; be sure you’re committing to a program that fulfills all the requirements for getting licensed to teach where you live.

For aspiring educators in California, refer to University of Massachusetts Global’s [Guide to California Teaching Credentials](#) for more information on the path ahead.

Become a Student

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