

**I AM A MASTER PAINTER**, and the classroom is my canvas. I fill the canvas with faith in today, hope for tomorrow, and a love of teaching and learning. My classroom reflects this joy about learning, and it has the unmistakable hum of academic advancement, as well as the social and emotional growth of the young people who come here to learn.

I see my classroom as an assemblage of different-shaped chunks of purposeful activity. It is a center for creative thinking and achievement, where every day is a wonderful day for living and learning.

I understand that as a teacher, I wear many different hats. To fulfill this wide range of tasks, I need a great many skills and strategies. I am always adding to my toolbox and expanding my abilities.

Good teaching is built on good habits, and I do my best to develop these and to outgrow the bad habits that get in my way. Like any professional, I have a well-thought-out mission, which I refine as I grow. I learn from my mistakes and carry on.

In this chapter, I describe some fundamentals of the teaching profession.

## What Is a Teacher?

*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines *teacher* as "one whose job is to instruct." This definition, it seems to me, is incomplete because it leaves out half of the equation. A *teacher* is one whose job is to instruct *students*. This relationship—between teacher and student, expert and apprentice—should be at the heart of any definition. Over the years, that relationship has changed. Not so many years ago, it went something like this:

*I am the Authority.*  
*I will hold you Accountable.*  
*Then I will Affirm you.*  
*And finally Accept you.*



Today, that model is quite different.

*I Accept you no matter what.*  
*I Affirm my commitment to you.*  
*I will be Accountable for your progress.*  
*And you will then view me as an Authority.*



As a teacher, you will teach subject matter, but so much more. As many have said in different ways, you will also teach *who you are*.

*Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but  
 they have never failed to imitate them.*

—James Baldwin (quoted in Reader's  
 Digest Association, 1997)

Parker Palmer, a master teacher who has written widely on education, provides a description of a teacher that is much richer than the dictionary's bare-bones definition.

*I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens before us, when our experience is illuminated by lightning life of the mind—then teaching is the finest work I know.*

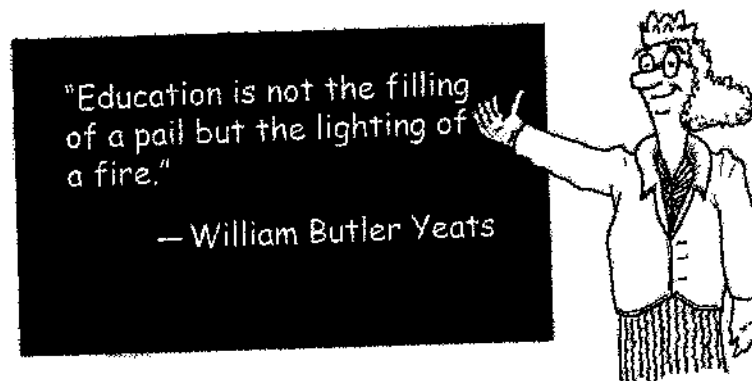
—Parker Palmer (1997)

## Roles of a Teacher

We can also describe what a teacher *is* by what a teacher *does*. To be a teacher, you must be a master of not just one trade, but many. Here's an alphabetical listing of just a few of these skills.

Counselor	listens to learners
Expert resource person	develops and shares information
Facilitator	guides learning
Laboratory supervisor	provides hands-on instruction
Lecturer	conveys information
Media expert	leads discussion
Meeting leader	directs activities
Programmer	offers computer-assisted instruction
Tutor	gives one-on-one instruction

Besides needing to master these many trades, a teacher needs to know which skills are required at a given moment and be able to reach for the right tool without a minute's hesitation. As influential American educator Madeline Cheek Hunter once said,



*Teachers must be very skilled, very knowledgeable, and exquisitely well-trained because neither the teacher nor the surgeon can say, Everybody sit still until I figure out what in the heck we're going to do next.*

—Madeline Cheek Hunter (quoted in Goldberg, 1990)

Great teachers are competent in all of these areas:

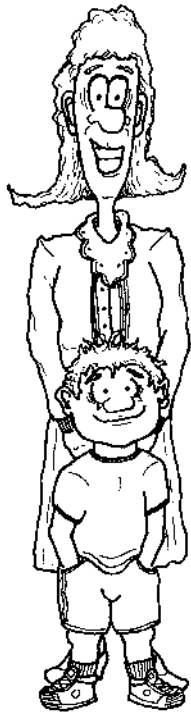
- Knowledge of content
- Knowledge of child growth and development
- Familiarity with materials and how to use them
- Classroom management skills
- Human relations skills
- Planning skills

Because what teachers do is directly connected to their relationships with students and others, some personal qualities are also useful—and they're frequently noted in the best teachers you meet:

- Teachers . . .
- demonstrate a zest for living and a tendency to enjoy dealing with all kinds of people
  - are unconditional, vigorous advocates of young learners
  - have well-thought-out commitments and stick to them
  - run their classroom with a humble spirit and a grateful humility

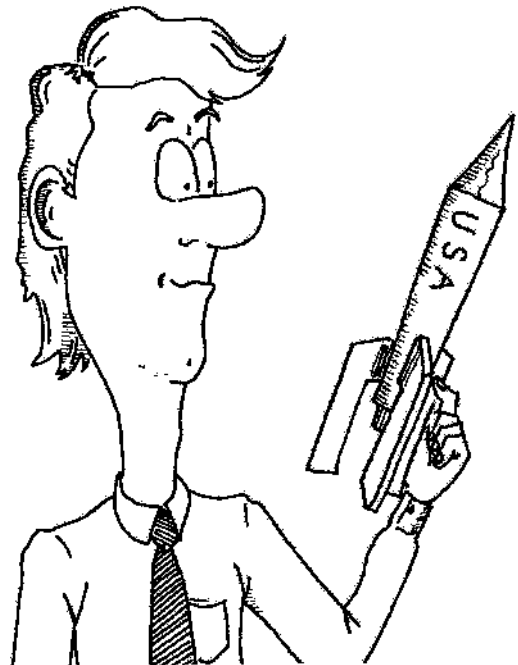


If the three Rs of learning are reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, then the three Cs of teaching are caring, commitment, and competence.



I *care* about you and your academic growth.

I've been doing this for some time, and I know that I'm competent in what I know and where we're headed.



I'm *committed* to guide my students' academic, social, and emotional development. I want to make this classroom experience an important part of a great school experience.



How can you judge a teacher's professional abilities? Let's imagine that teachers are master artists, and their medium is crayons. Your mastery of teaching, then, can be expressed in the number of crayons in your crayon box.

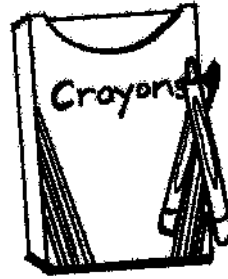
How many crayons are in your crayon box?

8?



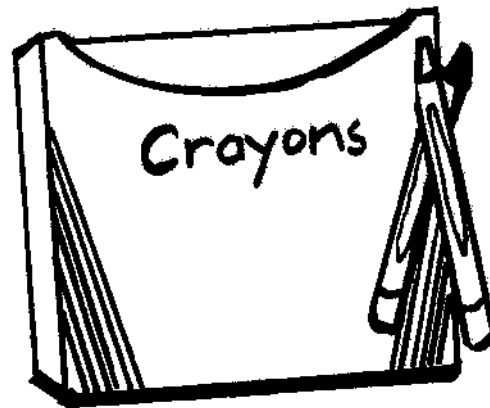
- Chalk-and-talk teaching (lecture only)
- Passive students
- Very little visual reinforcement (even though 80 percent of kids are visual learners)
- Diminished interest in grade level or subject matter
- Low level of enthusiasm
- New year—same old stuff

16?



- Engages in chalk-and-talk teaching with small and large group activities
- Uses more visual reinforcement
- Has increased comfort with planning
- Feels really good about grade level and subject content
- Begins to seek out ways to stay fresh and current
- Visits other classrooms

**64!!!** (with the  
sharpener in  
the back)



- Has created a visual collection of pictures and materials
- Uses a variety of instructional approaches: small and large group, one-on-one, team teaching, and self-paced instruction
- Is in charge—the rabbit in its very own briar patch
- Attends workshops, conferences, and classes
- Shares ideas with and mentors other teachers
- Holds students accountable; students are actively involved and on-task

Of course, no one starts out as a master teacher. In fact, there's a rather well-traveled ladder that goes from the beginner to the master. Here's how it looks.



### **Novice Teacher**

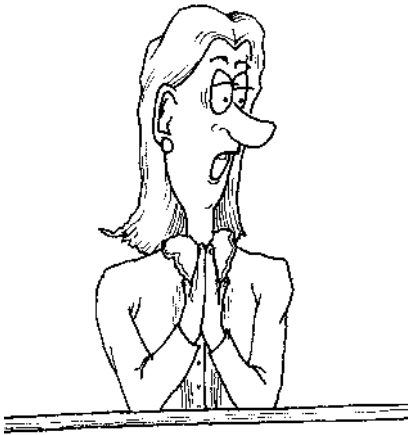
- Is simply trying to survive
- Has many ups and downs
- Is textbook bound
- Is very busy and "alone" at times
- Learns an enormous amount
- Finds that planning is important and time consuming
- Faces discipline and parent challenges

### **Advanced Beginner**

- Has gained episodic knowledge (experience), which makes decisions easier
- Acquires increased grouping knowledge
- Sees similarities and connections
- Is more strategic at getting things done
- Has greater understanding of how a lesson or unit fits into the total picture







### Competent Teacher

- Feels much stronger
- Discriminates curriculum decisions
- Finds that routines become automatic
- Takes responsibility
- Realizes the classroom as his or her milieu

### Master Teacher

- Has a sense of the situation—knows what's going on
- Makes decisions based on lots of experience
- Uses higher-level thinking skills
- Has excellent assessment skills
- Manages class with ease and fluidity—classroom runs like a Swiss watch
- Engages in teaching that fits the vision



## Creating a Mission Statement

Before you ever enter a classroom, you should have a mission statement: a set of goals that you are working toward as a teacher. As you consider what you want to say, you might want to examine some other mission statements, particularly those of teachers you admire.

The Walt Disney Company expresses its mission in just four words:

*Dream      Dare      Believe      Do*

The Squirrel Run School needs six:

*We care . . .*

*We share . . .*

*We dare.*

Here are some ideas you might consider as you build your own mission statement:

- Academic progress of every student
- Social and emotional growth of each child
- Development and creation of life skills
- Happy kids who can't wait to get to school
- Overjoyed parents who are enthusiastic supporters of their teacher and their school
- A community delighted with its educational investment
- A smile at the end of a great year

My mission statement includes these goals:

- To empower
- To impart knowledge
- To accept and respect each child unconditionally
- To provide a safe, warm, loving learning environment
- To impart skills that facilitate learning

- To open the eyes of young students to the world of learning

Once you have a mission statement, don't keep it to yourself.

Post your mission statement in the classroom so everyone can see that you eat, breathe, and sleep its principles.

Include the statement in parent newsletters.

Refer to the mission statement at your annual "Meet the Teacher" session.

Plan and schedule school activities to support your mission.



## Building Habits, Making Mistakes

*Old habits can't be thrown out of the upstairs window, they have to be coaxed down the stairs one step at a time.*

—Mark Twain (quoted in Readers Digest Association, 1997)

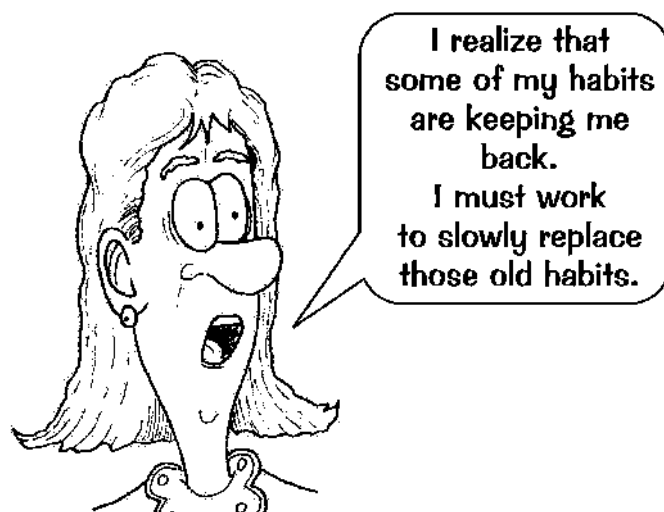
We all have habits—some good, some bad. The trick is to beef up the good habits and get rid of the bad ones.

Some habits are particularly important to guard against.

Don't be a purveyor of gossip—and don't listen. Discourage others from gossiping whenever you can.

Don't find fault with people around you. This is an insidious habit. If it spreads to others, it can poison the school environment.

Don't get a swelled head. People naturally praise an excellent teacher, but if you take that praise too seriously, you can become self-centered, thus putting the interests of your reputation ahead of your students.



We all make mistakes. The goal is to decrease the number of mistakes in your overall experience.

As your experience grows, you feel worse about mistakes—you feel that you ought to know better. The thing is, just when you think you've got your diploma in experience, someone will come up with a new course requirement. You could be a teacher for a hundred years and still be greeted by a child or class that's a fresh challenge.

Experience does make us stronger, however. The trials and tribulations of your first encounter with a problem strengthen your resolve to withstand each new occurrence.

Here are a few ways to guard against mistakes:

Do your homework. Gather pertinent data before you make a big decision.

Consult with experts, supervisors or mentors, and professional friends to give you support and feedback.

Attend conferences, workshops, seminars, and graduate classes—you never know everything you need to know.

And never try to cover up a mistake—you'll only make it worse. Admit your error and promise not to repeat it. As the Chinese proverb says,

*When you bow, bow low.*

## Your Journey to Master Teacher

As I said a few pages back, no one starts out being a master teacher. Experience is the road you take to get there, and everything you do is experience. What you experience becomes the fabric of your life as a teacher. It molds and directs your future classroom adventures. Some might call experiences *good* or *bad*, but the classification *different* is probably more accurate.

Throughout your journey as a teacher, maintain a commitment to excellence.

Never settle for mediocrity—in your efforts or in your students' efforts.

Do the right thing the right way for the right reason.

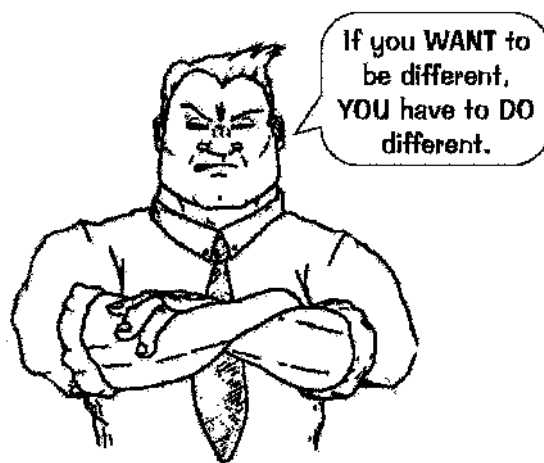
Treat all students, regardless of their background or talent, as equal in dignity and worth.

Model your dedication with vigor and enthusiasm.

As you move along the path from novice to advanced beginner to competent teacher to master, keep your eye on the goal: to be an effective and respected teacher.

Here's what you'll look like:

- You have a positive attitude when dealing with all kinds of kids and parents—and the opportunities they present.
- You optimize any and all situations, even the ugly ones, by using your damage-control skills.
- You keep your commitments—you're always where you're supposed to be when you're supposed to be there.
- You keep alive the "big ideas" that led you to a teaching career, continuing to nurture not just your professional development but your hopes and dreams, as well.





### ***Only the Brave Should Teach***

*Only the brave,*

*Only the brave should teach.*

*Only those who love the young should teach.*

*Teaching is a vocation.*

*It is as sacred as the priesthood;*

*as innate a desire, as inescapable*

*as the genius which compels an artist.*

*If one has not the concern for humanity,*

*the love of living creatures,*

*the vision of the priest and the artist,*

*one must not teach.*

—Pearl S. Buck (quoted in Lipscomb, Webb, and Conn, 1994)