

What Qualities Should Preschool Teachers Have?

By Steve Bauer, Operations Manager,
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When most new teachers first enter a classroom, they are faced with a terrifying realization: each one has the capacity to impact, shape and affect their students' lives forever.

This is certainly true no matter the age group a teacher receives; however, it is even a greater truth for the average teacher working in preschool classrooms because this is the time the first impressions regarding the educational process are experienced by children.

For parents, the critical aspects they should consider as the third party in their child's education are—does my child feel comfortable in the classroom? Is my child accepted as an individual, and, is the teacher sensitive to my child's needs? What parents are hoping, and deserve to receive from any school and any teacher is the same thing: the bond, the bridge, the connection between the home and the school.

These three questions basically can be addressed objectively to some degree. In the first case parents should look for a classroom environment that is safe, hygienic, and secure because the classroom will eventually be the place where a child spends almost as much time as at home. Safety, security and health issues are largely the responsibility of the school's management and operating systems. The teacher, however, is responsible for creating an environment where learning, exploration and opportunities for experimentation and discovery occur naturally and in an enjoyable manner. In preschools, one of the best approaches a teacher can take, in the opinion of most experts is to “set up your classroom so the children have fun.”

Obviously, if the parent opens the door to a classroom and sees only row upon row of desks, with identical photocopied worksheets decorating the walls, they should realize that their child may only be occupied with “busy” work in a regimented, controlled atmosphere that may, in fact, hinder creativity and self-expression. On the other hand, plentiful, age appropriate materials, well within the reach of little hands should attract inquisitive minds and encourage the child's imagination and enthusiasm for exploration with the necessary comfort he or she needs.

In order to create a bond between the school and the child, each teacher truly needs to understand, and provide attention to each child they encounter. The teacher is the point person to assess the child's individual needs, personality and rate of development. Reputable schools provide ample opportunities for the teachers to document their students' individual strengths and weaknesses. In the preschool environment, academic progress should be a separate issue (if it is considered at all) because the children are just reaching the stage of development where learning begins. Parents and teachers need to allow the child sufficient time to develop the appropriate physical, emotional and social skills without “comparison assessments” of academics. They should speak at least every three to four months with the teacher regarding the child's progress.

A similar factor to the individual child's needs is whether or not the teacher is sensitive to the preschooler's personality that is in its formative stages. Once again, parents will make a judgment based on their initial interaction with the teacher. Parents should carefully observe

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the teacher's body language, tone of voice, warmth and personality. This is important because preschool children will only learn when they are in a trusting environment. Good teachers and good parents make an effort to get to know one another during the first days of school, and if possible, the school should allow both the child and parent to visit the classroom "after hours" to ensure an easy adjustment period for the child.

Most adults can reflect on their earliest school days and recall a "favorite teacher:" the one who made us welcome, who dried our tears, comforted us when we had minor bumps or bruises and taught us our first understanding of right and wrong in school. Of course, we had an emotional bond with that precious instructor; if parents can remember that special feeling, they should also be able to identify the one thing every teacher must share with every child—the ability to love.

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