

## So What Do You Want to Teach?

When a person introduces themselves to you as a teacher, the question that you invariably ask is "So what do you teach?" How the person answers that question can tell you a lot not only about how they feel about their calling as a teacher and how they feel about their students as well. Usually you get one of two answers. Either the answer is "Oh I teach the fifth grade" or "I teach Algebra". If the answer is a grade level, the teacher probably handles more than one topic. If the answer is a topic such as algebra, then the teacher is a specialist in that topic bringing that area of knowledge to any gathering of students who are assigned to his or her room.

If you are thinking about becoming a teacher, you might pose the question to yourself of, "So what do you want to teach?" Its a question that is loaded with meaning. Because how you answer that question may determine if you are a person who has a passion for a particular topic that is looking for an audience, any audience, to listen to it being taught or if you are a true teacher. Because if you ask a true teacher what they want to teach, the answer will come back, "I want to teach students."

That analysis may seem a bit snobby but the distinction is an important one. The distinction will tell the tale about how well that teacher will relate to his or her students and how long that such a teacher will last in an academic setting. You can tell when you have met a subject based teacher. They only speak with passion about the topic. They have an absolute fascination which may border on an obsession with the topic area. And they have very little tolerance for anyone who does not share that passion for the topic.

So is that person a teacher? Well in the most general sense of the word, yes he or she is because they do have the job of passing their specialized knowledge along to a student group. But it might be more apt to call such a teacher a lecturer or a recruiter because their real devotion is to the topic, not to the students. A subject based teacher is impatient with students who either are not showing talent and passion for their topic area or who interrupt their subject based monologue with questions which only break his stream of thought.

The root word of the term "teacher" is "teach". The definition of teaching then is to build knowledge and skills in a student. You may have found the use of the term we used "a true teacher" a bit elitist. But a teacher who is in the career field of teaching because they have an unquenchable passion for seeing students become educated and who takes delight from seeing students "light up" when they "get it" is indeed a true teacher.

A true teacher is far less obsessed with a perfect discussion and dialog about

the topic at hand as they are obsessed with taking a body of young people and turning them from a random gathering of kids into "students". A true teacher is as much concerned with inspiring a desire to learn as he or she is with the topic being taught. And for a true teacher, the student's experience is more important the outline of the day and if they can take an hour and turn a disinterested youth into a passionate student of learning, that is an hour well spent.

We went through this exercise so you can apply some of these criteria to your own desire to become a teacher. Examine your motivations. If you are going into teaching to make converts to your love of your subject area, you will do some good no doubt. But because you will encounter frustrations and meet students who will never share you love of your topic, the danger of burn out is high and the possibility of a long career in teaching is low.

Be a "true teacher" and seek the good of your students. And if you go into the work to create students from disinterested young people, you are in the right line of work and will enjoy a long and rewarding career in teaching.

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