

## Can You Teach if You Are Old?

If you are just preparing to enter the ranks of professional teachers and you are not a recent college graduate, its easy to feel a bit insecure and ask that question, "Can you teach if you are old?" Its a fair question even if you are not so far along in life that you consider yourself to be "old". But it is easy to feel old if you are a middle aged or senior adult among 20 year olds in teacher college and if the competition for the teaching jobs are kids that could be your own sons or daughters.

There are a lot of jobs where there is a noticeable age bias against older workers. In the business world, sometimes companies prefer to hire younger workers because they work cheap and if they work out, there is such a longer career life ahead of them. But even in the business setting, many forward thinking employers are beginning to realize that the ranks of older workers contain a group of workers who are stable, hard working and devoted employees. So too schools are realizing more and more that hiring an older worker is not a disadvantage at all but that you bring a lot of good with you that the school should be thrilled to have.

If anything the profession of teaching is a perfect environment for someone who has seen a bit of life and who has matured and perhaps raised children of their own. Teaching full time while rewarding can be a huge challenge because it is sometimes hard to establish your authority in the class room and there are so many ways for a disruption to hurt the flow of teaching that is so important to accomplish your academic goals each day. An older worker is less prone to panic about disruptions or sudden problems that might come up as you teach and you have the experience and maturity to handle the problem efficiently without upsetting the rest of the class and get everyone back on task quickly.

It could be that one concern those who hire new teachers might have with an older worker is energy. Younger workers are able to keep up physically with children and they need to know that you won't tire during a long school day and that you have the physical stamina to get through a school day and come back for more tomorrow. There are a number of ways you can demonstrate that you are in shape and up to the challenge of teaching. You can put on a show of energy and enthusiasm during the interview. Or you could go so far as to offer to substitute teach or be a teacher assistant for a day so the administrator can witness first hand our energy and ability to "keep up" with those kiddos.

There is a good chance that not only will you encounter no age based bias or discrimination from school administrators, you will find that they already have a number of older teachers on staff so they know the value the school gets from

that experience and wisdom. But the relationship that may give you more concern is whether the students can accept an older teacher and give you the same respect and regard that they would give to someone just out of college.

It may come as the biggest surprise of them all that children and even teenagers really do not mind older teachers or older people for that matter. After all, to a child, every adult is an older teacher so they may not even notice that you are 20 years older than their last teacher. To a kid, old is old so what's the difference? Moreover, children have relationships with parents, uncles and aunts and grandparents that are loving and respectful so if they lump you in with those role models, you have it made.

What students don't like are older people who try to deny that they are old, who are ashamed of their age or who try to act younger than they are. Youth crave honesty. And youth are also quite aware that older age awaits them down the road so the last thing they want to see is you showing shame or discomfort because of your age. By being honest about your age with the kids, they will embrace you easily and you will have no difficulty teaching them.

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Word Count 749