

The Three Pillars of Great Teaching

Maestro, maître, mestre, teacher, are just four of many ways to describe those we look to for knowledge, but what does teacher really mean? The Romans used the Latin word *magister* meaning master to describe teachers. Teachers are masters of knowledge in any realm, not just the academic world, but in all aspects of life. Yet a good teacher is not a master to a servant or slave, a great teacher is a master to an apprentice. An influential teacher is one who respects their students, doesn't just give out facts, but gives out knowledge for their students to use on their own paths of life.

If one intends on teaching others, it's important to be able to communicate with the pupils. The first step to opening up that communication is getting people to pay attention. But if attention is something to be paid, then what's the price: respect. Speakers aren't getting anywhere if it's clear that they are looking down upon or thinking little of their audience. Education can only work if the student chooses to listen. The student doesn't have to agree or like their teacher, the student just has to listen. Yet why should someone listen if the master treats them like they wish they were somewhere else? In Mr. Holland's Opus, we see a pretentious musician who thinks he's above connecting with his students and no one enjoys the experience. It's only once he comes down to their level and relates his lessons to rock and roll, something his students enjoy, that any learning actually occurs. When a teacher is standing in front of a class, the students aren't thinking about what degree the teacher has or what school it's from. The class is focused on whether they can connect with the human in front of them so the knowledge can flow through them from one human to another. It's the human connection that makes the knowledge stick and the connection only occurs when there's respect.

Once a great teacher can get the students to pay attention the teacher must not just explain concepts, but inspire the students by providing a compass, so to speak, to lead them on their path through life. American psychologist Abraham Maslow, describes this compass as the fulfillment of one's self actualization needs, which is famously found on his hierarchy of needs pyramid. Maslow (1943) describes this level as the desire to accomplish everything that one can, to become the most that one can be" (McLoed). However when I think about the great teachers who I think have helped fulfill my self actualization needs, at the moment, I never fully understood the impact that they had on me until I left their classrooms, and was able to see the bigger picture. The first great teacher that comes to mind takes me back to ninth grade geometry class with a woman named Ms. Schumacher. At this time in my class and still to this day, I've had a chip on my shoulder about math, and as a more naive fourteen year old, I was content with just getting geometry over with: a stepping stone to more interesting things. Enter Ms. Schumacher, an older woman obsessed with every little detail on my homework heading and determined to teach her class how to do proofs in as many steps as possible. I used to sit in her class questioning why I had to prove the triangles were congruent with things like Side Angle Side when the image clearly showed that the triangles were congruent. Deep down I think she knew that I wasn't going to remember the angle theorems she was explaining; that wasn't the point in the long run. "Never trust the shape, prove it", meant "things aren't always what they seem, make sure you have evidence before you believe it". The headings on the papers weren't about name, date, and period, they were about organizing your thoughts before you start something. Her subject might have been geometry, but her true lessons were like road signs to help me on all of life's little avenues. Mr. Keating's goal in the Dead Poet's Society wasn't for his students to

remember the words of Walt Whitman, it was for his students to follow their dreams and get inspired by poetry and relate it to their lives rather than look at it in a calculated mundane way.

So once the teacher has given and commanded respect and inspired people, what else does it take to be a great teacher? The third element, which in some ways is the most important element, is passion in your subject. “Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason mastery demands all of a person” (Einstein). If one plans on inspiring others, shouldn't they care about what they do with their whole heart? I was lucky enough to have a teacher who cared about her subject with her whole self and because of her passion for the subject, it not only inspired me, but also made me want to listen to her. That teacher was my English teacher Mrs. Trent. I remember starting small discussions with her at the end of seventh period about the texts we were reading in class, us just talking about literature and then looking at the clock realizing an hour or more had passed. While I will admit the texts were quite interesting, I don't think I would've lasted more than ten minutes in a discussion with a teacher uninspired by literature, but she cared. She cared enough to listen to outside perspectives because she herself was interested in learning more about the texts too. When someone is passionate about a subject they choose to feed that fire rather than let it die when they reach their mastery.

In conclusion a great teacher isn't just a magester or master of knowledge as the Romans suggested, a great teacher respects people and commands respect back like Mr. Holland, has the ability to inspire people on a higher level like Ms. Schumacher and Mr. Keating, and has extreme passion for their work like Mrs. Trent. Anyone can be a teacher, but it takes that extra human connection to be a great teacher. Great teachers make a greater society.

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