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Empathetic Teaching

In pondering the question of what makes a great teacher, I was reminded of the teachers I've had who I have truly thought of as great. The truth is, I realized I have had very few. The few, however, distinctly stuck out and were extremely impactful in my life. I came to the realization that, although they were very different people and had different styles of teaching, they all had one thing in common. Each one of them possessed an immense amount of empathy.

Now I know empathy doesn't really seem like a necessary quality in teaching, surely you'd assume there are more important qualities of a teacher such as their intelligence or ability to control their students. However, I've had many teachers who were very smart but weren't what I'd consider great or even good teachers. The reason I think empathy is the factor in defining a great teacher is that the teachers with empathy find ways to present their material in ways those learning from them will be able to grasp and understand. Empathy allows them to look at what their students have experienced, what is going on in their lives, and to find ways to relate to their students. In doing so, the teachers are able to cater their lessons, assignments, and workload to what the students will relate to, and consequently remember and understand. The truly great teachers taught in a way that ensured their students understood the material because they took the extra time to place themselves in the shoes of their students and understand what lessons and words would resonate with them.

Some of the best teachers I've had, we're teaching some of the most difficult concepts and curriculum but the reason they were so good is because they presented the material in a way that was comprehensible and easy to understand. I didn't always enjoy all of their classes, some assigned lots of work, some assigned very little, some taught naturally very easy subjects and some taught very confusing ones. Regardless, no matter how difficult the course was or how

much work the teachers assigned, each good teacher I've had found ways to distill complex concepts into words and ideas that not only made sense to their students but also became ingrained in their long term memory. Each one of them applied the necessary empathy to recognize what their students would best relate to and comprehend.

To explain what I mean by this I would like to point to someone whom I consider to be one of the best teachers in history: Jesus Christ. He is widely one of the most well known teachers in human history. He is also the picture of empathy. In all that He did He was thinking about the feelings of others, even in the choice to become man so that He could show He relates to us and so that we can relate to Him. When looking at Jesus' teaching style, what made His teaching so effective, I realized one of the reasons so many people listened to Him was because He spoke in parables. Jesus' reasoning for teaching in parables was mainly so that those He was speaking to could understand His messages. He told stories and gave examples that allowed people to understand complex issues in simpler terms because they could relate to his parables. He recognized what His followers experienced and what they would best understand so He taught in terms that would resonate with their experiences. For example in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, He taught about the Kingdom of God through the explanation of seeds falling on different soils because most He was speaking to understood farming. The great teachers I've had shared this quality with Jesus, they all taught in ways in which they were trying to ensure that their students truly understood their lessons by presenting them in simple, relatable terms. .

The more I think about it I realize that the majority of those I've had that I consider to be good teachers, in the moment, actually taught a class that I didn't enjoy. I can count the good teachers I've had on one hand and I remember when I was actively in many of their classes, I

didn't actually enjoy it. Frankly I sometimes dreaded their classes. I remember my freshman year geometry class, I had an exuberant teacher named Mrs. Schumacher my last period of the day. I often dreaded going to that class because it was rigorous and she demanded deep thinking and would call me out on questions when I wasn't paying attention. Math has never been my strongest subject and that class challenged me and was probably my least favorite class my freshman year. That being said, the concepts she went over are drilled into my head and I can still envision the exact formulas displayed on her old fashioned projector. Since taking that class, I've noticed that on every standardized test, such as the ACT, the only section of the math that I excel at is geometry. I often didn't enjoy her class but she taught in a way that made sure I understood and continued to understand and remember the material years later. I think that often when people think of a great teacher, they think of a fun teacher, whose class is enjoyable and easy but in my experience those are not always the qualities that prove to be effective.

Great teaching is rare. There are many different traits and teaching styles that can establish a good teacher but empathy is the one quality that separates a good teacher from a great one. The teachers who don't just explain the required curriculum or say what textbooks tell them to, but who take the time to think about what their students are experiencing and find ways to relate to them are the one who most effectively educate. By presenting the material in ways their students relate to, these teachers raise the likelihood that their students won't simply memorize definitions or formulas but will truly understand the concepts and that understanding will carry with them in their future. The empathetic teachers I've had taught me concepts and lessons that I continue to understand and can apply to my current classes and life experiences. These great teachers have caused not only educational success in my life but also mental maturity and character growth. And so I would like to thank the great teachers I've had for challenging me

and enriching my knowledge, for answering my questions, and taking the time to ensure the material was understandable and memorable- Mr. Picott, Mrs. Schumacher, Mr. Healy, Mr. Geoffrion, and Mr. Argenti. To my brother, Steven, who acts with more empathy than anyone I know, thank you for teaching me how to treat others by your example and for encouraging me to ask the tough questions so that I gain a deeper understanding. And to the teacher who continues daily to mature my mind and present His lessons in ways I can understand at just the right times- thank you Jesus for the increasing wealth of knowledge You continue to provide.