

Pronunciation practice

Reading text 4

Tips for people thinking of becoming teachers

Some young people who are good at a subject at school and who have one or two teachers they look up to might be considering becoming teachers themselves. What these young people need to remember, however, is that being good at a subject doesn't mean you will necessarily be a good teacher. There is a lot more to teaching than knowing your stuff. For the right kind of person, teaching is a career that can be immensely satisfying. However, if you are not up to the challenges of working with groups of 30 or so overly-hormonal teenagers, it can leave you feeling that someone just dropped you very cruelly into a pit full of lions.

To be a good teacher you have to be good at finding ways to get young people interested in the subject - to arouse their curiosity. This requires a profound appreciation of the way young people think and feel - something which many people lose as they pursue a narrow interest in their chosen subject. People may graduate from university with an excellent qualification but then find it almost impossible to capture the imaginations of students who come into the classroom wishing they were still out in the yard with their mates. Sometimes people who are too hooked on their own subject quickly become disillusioned with the difficulties of working with teenagers who are not patiently waiting to hear about poetry or photosynthesis.

Teachers also need to be good at what is called classroom management. They need to decide how the pupils should enter the room, where they should sit, how the desks should be arranged and they need to come up with a good lesson plan with an interesting variety of activities to keep the pupils motivated. Discipline is also a huge issue. Teachers can't just talk enthusiastically about their subject. They also have to be good at policing the classroom. However well a lesson is planned there may still be disruptive pupils who must be dealt with firmly. Even the good pupils will quickly lose respect for a teacher who obviously cannot effectively control unruly elements.

The demands of maintaining order in the classroom are one reason why it is vital for teachers to have a high level of self-esteem. It is not uncommon for individuals who devote themselves to their subjects and do very well at them to have a low level of self-esteem. Unresolved teenage problems of mixing with their peers can mean that even as adults these people still have a general sense of social insecurity. This can lead to catastrophe when these people try to start teaching. If you don't feel very confident in strange social situations you will find the demands of classroom management just too much to cope with.

People who have this insecurity either keep too much of a distance from the pupils and fail to establish any meaningful communication or they do the opposite and nervously try to be a friend to everybody. The latter in particular is a recipe for disaster. Teachers need to be able to relate to their students and need to be approachable so that students feel able to ask for help if they get into difficulties, but the classroom will slide into chaos if the teacher tries to create the impression that we are all mates.

Some people who grew up in closely-knit neighbourhoods and went to a small local school will experience a huge shock if they go to teach in a large inner-city school. Gone are the days when teachers inspired a sense of awe in their pupils. Young people who are unable to achieve anything in the school system and those who have discovered sex and drugs and rock and roll and have come to the conclusion that school sucks know that in reality there is nothing the teacher can do to hurt them. Corporal punishment is forbidden and the student can just refuse to follow instructions. Students who are only interested in being the centre of attention can cause a huge headache for a teacher who just wants to get down to reading the poems she so carefully chose for the lesson.

It is a challenging job, but all the challenges can be met. There is no situation so serious that it cannot be dealt with effectively by a well-trained teacher, but to become a well-trained teacher you need to start out with the right kind of character. You need to be made of a certain kind of stuff (quite tough stuff) to make it as a teacher.