Dante Lafranchi

Mr. Rutherford

Oxford Scholar

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Great Teaching

There are several qualities and skills that a teacher must possess to be considered “great”. There are a plethora of teachers that I have experienced learning under, but I would only refer to a couple as being great. The general purpose of a teacher is to communicate information to the students in a way that facilitates learning and growth. Great teachers are great communicators who foster a love for learning in the students. Great teachers are adaptable, accommodating, engaging, and they value real-world learning.

The pandemic transformed how educators conveyed information, and great teachers adapted to the new circumstances. Especially in California where students were on zoom for about a year, the flexibility and adaptability of teachers was tested. Great teachers found ways to still teach the information on zoom and attempted to make the class engaging, even though the environment was very different from a normal classroom. During zoom school, some of my teachers let the students loose at the beginning of each period. They told the students to read the book, watch some videos, and do the assignment. It appears to me that those teachers gave up during zoom, they didn’t even make an attempt to teach the class like they would in a normal year. An example of a great teacher that shined during this period is Mr. Greco, who taught me math. He continued his lectures through zoom by taking advantage of the technology available to him. Mr. Greco often stopped and encouraged his students to ask questions if they were confused. Additionally, he made the class interactive by asking students to put up a zoom reaction, or asking them how they were doing.

Great teachers know that students learn in different ways, and they try to accommodate that. Some students are auditory learners, while others are visual learners. Other students learn best by reading the textbook and taking notes. Great teachers try to incorporate all of these aspects into their class in an attempt to appeal to the learning styles of most or all students. Great teachers also accommodate students who struggle. They hold office hours and encourage students to come get help so they actually understand the material.

Great teachers keep the students engaged and interested in the subject matter. Mr. Geoffrion is an excellent example of a great teacher who was engaging. He often held class discussions, where many students including myself gladly joined in. Students can get bored and daze off after a long lecture. So if class discussions work in the subject, like history, they are a way to make students engaged. Mr. Geoffrion also assigned projects or in class activities. He gave his students general directions, but allowed them to put their own spin on whatever they were doing. This way, students were able to dive into a specific part of the material that most interested them.

Applying the information students learn to real world situations is another skill of great teachers. Some classes, especially those that involve math, are viewed as relatively useless in the real world because the students will rarely use the material they learned in real life situations. My physics teacher, Mr. McMahon, connected the information we were learning in class to experiences in the real world. My favorite example is when he connected the doppler effect to sounds you hear when a moving car approaches and passes you. The sound is low frequency when it is far away and then gradually gets more high frequency as it approaches you. The sound then gradually gets more low frequency as it goes farther and farther past you.

Last but not least, great teachers foster a true love for learning in their students. Most students don’t like going into class and learning, but great teachers can change that and instill a passion for learning in their students. There are many qualities that a teacher should have to be known as a great teacher. I have found a few to be the most important in my experience: being flexible, accommodating, engaging, applying the material to real life situations, and fostering a desire to learn in their students.