

What Makes A Teacher Great?

An article in the 2006 January-February Children's Ministry magazine about the 7 characteristics of a great Christian educator got us thinking. What would those be for an Armenian Church Sunday School teacher? Not all that different. With thanks to Keith Johnson, here's food for thought:

1. **A Great Teacher Knows Jesus** – Many languages, Armenian included, have two words for the word “to know,” one meaning knowledge in the head sense and the other meaning to *really* know. For instance, you could describe a loved one by the color of his/her eyes, height, where they live, etc. But those are just the facts. The love you share with this person, whether a parent, spouse, dear friend or child, makes you know a whole lot more. It's the same with Jesus. Many good teachers know the facts about Jesus (and some don't even know these, alas). But a really great teacher knows and lives with the Lord on a daily basis. This feeling can overflow to the kids.
2. **A Great Teacher Loves Children** – Johnson offers a great quote here: ‘If you can't stand the smell of the sheep, stay out of the pastorate!’ And so it is in Christian education. We must love people. We must love children. This is not necessarily expressed in words; it can be expressed through patience, persistence, loving care taken in preparation, going the “extra mile” to make the class more fun, etc. Loving Jesus and loving children are interrelated.
3. **A Great Teacher Involves Kids** – When a classroom teacher genuinely involves children in learning, there's “a lot more noise than poise.” A great teacher doesn't do all the talking; rather, she facilitates the success of the kids' learning and so there is less hearing, more doing by students. And chaotic learning is better than quiet boredom.
4. **A Great Teacher Keeps Learning** – Okay, so far we've listed loving Jesus, loving kids, and involving kids as important characteristics for effective teaching. Now here's the lynchpin: keeping your mind and heart open to learning something new – about what you're teaching and from your students. SO, great teachers truly avail themselves of learning opportunities (Bible studies, lectures, helpful books, discussion groups, tapes, videos, classes). And they view the experiences and opinions of their students as genuinely enriching.
5. **Great Teachers Know What They're Teaching** – It's very simple – you know your curriculum, you know the Bible, you know your students. And you weave the three together with the help of your pastor, your parish and your community of teachers.
6. **Great Teachers Communicate Effectively** – In other words, you know how to recognize whether your kids get it and when to move on. It's about flexibility and objectivity. Great communicators spend as much time understanding their audience as they do preparing their speeches, or in the case of teachers, their lessons.
7. **Great Teachers Understand Kids' Styles** – We do kids a disservice when we teach only in the way *we* learn best. Anyone familiar with the educational theory of multiple intelligences knows that kids learn differently and that that's a great thing. Great teachers learn to vary their teaching styles to engage children who need to hear, to see, to move, to perform, etc. in order to learn most effectively.