

The Importance of Teachers

With another school year coming to a close, it is time to remind ourselves of the important roles teachers play in the lives of our children. Whether it is the teacher looking after children in the child care center or the first grade teacher working with six-year-olds in the elementary school classroom, teachers have the potential to significantly influence the learning and development of children.

Teachers play many roles in the childcare center and classroom. They sometimes are like referees on the basketball court, enforcing the rules of the game (the classroom) and dealing with the conflicts between the players (the children). Teachers must also be good administrators and managers, applying the policies of the school and creating an environment where the people in that environment can work together on a daily basis. And then there are all of the other hats a teacher must wear regularly: the nurse who tends to the scraped knee, the custodian who wipes down the table after snack and sweeps up the floor after art, and the treasurer who collects the money for the field trip and makes sure that the supplies are purchased for the holiday party.

But the most important role a teacher plays is supporter and facilitator of the development of each child in the center or classroom. This is why a teacher becomes a teacher in the first place. A teacher is a person who wants to make a difference in the life of a child. The ways in which a teacher makes a difference takes many forms. Introducing an activity in the classroom that lights up a child's curiosity. Helping a child see that she can work through an arithmetic problem that a moment ago seemed insurmountable. Moving a child from the "I don't know how to read" stage to "Look, teacher! I read this book myself!" Seeing children who begin the year as somewhat self-involved individuals develop into cooperative, kind classmates. All of these things happen because of the hard work and diligent efforts of teachers. And it's important to remember that the work and effort of teachers doesn't just occur between the opening and closing bells of the school day. There is a tremendous amount of work that occurs before the children arrive and after they leave each day in the way of planning, preparing, reviewing, and reflection.

We can debate whether or not teachers are paid fairly and the answers to that question will be found in issues of economics and community values. But

the significance of the time they spend with our children is not debatable. There are some less-than-stellar teachers out there but most of us can think back over our own educational experience and point to at least one teacher who made a significant impact on our life. It might be the teacher who opened our eyes to the mysteries of science, the teacher who helped us see the beauty of a poem, the teacher who was there for us during a troubling time of our life, or the teacher who saw a strength and talent in us that we didn't know we possessed. We remember the teachers who knew us as individuals and cared about us as people. That's what a good teacher does.

As another school year comes to a close, take the time to thank a teacher for their dedication and commitment to the growth and development of our children. They need to know that we care.

T.J. Corcoran, JD, MEd
Founder, The Corcoran School