I spent a remarkable month in New Zealand, where I visited, among other things, five kindergartens. When I mentioned the National Association for the Education of Young Children, teachers in Invercargill, Christchurch, and Wellington said in effect, 'Oh, yes! Lilian Katz! A great help to us!' Was I pleased! And I knew at once we'd speak the same language. I felt at home in any case, for their kindergartens—children, space, equipment, materials, and programs—are much like ours, with the same delight and challenge we have in the States.

One challenge that New Zealand schools share with ours is finding first-rate teachers. As I talked with teachers and friends, we agreed it's more than love for children, more than training and experience that make a good teacher. We felt a teacher's maturity and deeply held values are of major importance, and the most important values are kindness, courage, and integrity, in that order.

We decided kindness means heart, in helping others to help themselves; courage means working through whatever odds for what you most care about; and integrity means a well-knit personality combined with honesty in all you do. It means, as Polonius told his son, 'To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man' (Hamlet, 1.3).

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To live by values requires maturity. This includes, first of all, inner security, self-awareness, and integrity.

Inner security. Barbara Biber wrote 50 years ago, 'A teacher needs to be a person so secure within herself that she can function with principles rather than prescriptions, that she can exert authority without requiring submission, that she can work experimentally but not at random, and that she can admit mistakes without feeling humiliated' (Biber & Snyder 1948). One discerns these qualities in a teacher neither by résumé nor interview, but by observing her at work with children. Particularly watch for the qualities Biber mentions. And watch how the teacher encourages the children. When and how do they come to her? Are the children deeply involved in their play and work? How do they cooperate with each other? Is there a sense of warmth and humor as well as purpose among the children? Questions are endless. Keen observation requires attentive experience. Clear and consistent evidence of a teacher's inner security is truly important for good teaching.

Self-awareness. Because of its major importance, I began with the need for personal integration, or inner security, and shall come around to it again when I mention detachment. However, as teachers develop self-awareness, they improve in each quality mentioned as well as in self-evaluation. Teachers can help each other gain self-awareness through constructive criticism, with mutual trust and
Five (Boegehold et al. 1977). I feel it is the most useful foundation and guide for helping youngsters learn at their best in and for a democratic society. The word development suggests a continuing, complex process of growth and learning, while interaction occurs between the child’s emotional, physical, and cognitive growth and between the child and his expanding physical and social environment. The stress is on integrative action by the children. Developmental interaction is clearly aligned with NAEYC’s developmentally appropriate practice.

General knowledge with an emphasis on environmental science, community, and young children’s books. A good teacher of children younger than first grade should have the ability to impart the information needed for responsible citizenship in a democratic community. This includes having at least a college graduate’s general knowledge, or its equivalent, and effective access to the media, libraries, and the Internet. Young children learn social and academic skills through daily classroom experience. And teachers today must also steer young children toward a caring respect for our physical environment. Further, the teacher’s understanding of community is essential for developing cooperative learning in her classroom. It is through cooperative learning experience that children come to understand the benefits and responsibilities of a democratic community.

Good teachers know that, aside from their attainment of needed skills, young children do not require proficiency in traditional academic subjects. The important thing is not what they study, but how they learn. Good teachers know the value of a child’s innate curiosity and deep satisfaction in the learning process. Let no school dampen a child’s interest and joy in learning! And children soon know the value of firsthand experience. Einstein said, “Learning is experience. The rest is information.” “Spot on!” as they say in New Zealand, meaning, “just so!”
The teacher's able selection of picture books and her daily reading aloud to the children are essential parts of the reading-readiness program for four- and five-year-olds. (Fours, as well as fives, attend New Zealand kindergartens.)

**Warmth and respect for the child.** Good teachers show unflagging warmth, respect, and courtesy to children as a group and to each child as a unique and unrepeatable human being. Helping a child to make constructive, independent choices toward self-disciplined creativity depends very much on our genuine, total, and caring respect for that child and her way of working, her way of learning. Such respect cannot be accomplished without a teacher having a very real knowledge of child development as well as the qualities of inner security, self-awareness, and integrity.

Integrity and respect invite discretion. For a teacher to have good rapport with a child and her parents, she must keep their concerns confidential. If a specific problem requires professional discussion, the teacher explains this to the parents as well as to the child, in terms the child can understand. Respect for the privacy of the child and her family is essential to gain their trust.

**Trust in the child.** An outstanding characteristic of the good teacher is her ability to trust each child to find his own way toward personal integrity, acceptable behavior, and good learning purpose and ultimately to realize his unique potential. Genuine trust in a child depends on fundamental knowledge of child development and keen observation of the individual child. It depends on a teacher understanding the importance of carefully chosen structure for the learning environment. And it depends on an intuitive knowledge of the child in the learning situation.

Trust and respect for the child go hand in hand. Both demand a keen perception of the child's capacities and limits.

**Unconditional caring.** A good teacher cares about a child not because she needs to care for someone but because she knows intuitively that this child at this moment requires warm and close concern. She seeks nothing but the child's hopeful development in return.

Good teachers are approachable and friendly. They listen well, give warm support as needed, and share in laughter with, not at, the children.

Good teachers are keenly aware of emotional and physical safety for each child. Care is shown in constructing the environment for learning by the careful choice of equipment, materials, and spatial arrangements and a consistent, predictable program.

Children need unconditional approval: deep, steady, warm approval. A good teacher may condemn a child's words or actions, but not the child herself. While sometimes critical of behavior, a good teacher backs the child with her heart, and the child knows it.

**Intuition.** Contrary to strictly linear thinking, which Western science has insisted upon since Isaac Newton's *Principia* in 1687, intuition, a nonreasoning, often sudden, gut approach to thinking, is now gaining credence even among scientists. For many of us it often sways our thinking. Why Mainly because it *feels* right a. it works. A well-balanced, mature, and keenly observant teacher knows in her bones how to be with a child. Later she may defend her actions with reason. Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge," and imagination lives with intuition.

**Detachment.** Professional detachment allows respect, trust, and unconditional love to come through to the child. On the surface, detachment and love may seem a paradox, but precisely the opposite is true. A teacher with inner security and mature self-awareness, a teacher at ease and fulfilled by her own adult development, does not impose her personal needs onto her relationships with children. A teacher's detachment allows her to feel empathy without projection; she does not naively attribute her own unconscious.
negative feelings to the children. Detachment gives children psychological space. It deters sarcasm and contempt, which are crushing to a child. Detachment helps a teacher test and use her knowledge of child development with a degree of wisdom.

Laughter. One sign of detachment is often delightful humor, and humor in the classroom is important. It signals enjoyment. It invites friendship. It often opens the way for cooperative learning. While shared humor lights the morning, laughing at a child’s expense should be nipped at once. Affectionate laughter is an indispensable quality in good teaching.

A model for children. Teachers, like it or not, are models of emotion, thought, and behavior for the children in their care. A substantial part of a child’s learning is modeling, copying, and trying to think, feel, and be like persons consistently close at hand and dear to the child. To the degree that a teacher fills a child’s needs and is loved by him, she will personify values and behavior that touch him deeply, often throughout his life. The personality of a teacher, her instinctive kindness, her deep integrity, her lively interest in life and learning, will all affect the children. It’s a sobering responsibility, an inspiring challenge.

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Whether in our country or halfway around the world in New Zealand, we do need good teachers. And, as Barbara Biber has said, “Good teaching requires a fine blend of strength and delicacy” (Biber & Snyder 1948). Besides love for children, besides training and experience, a teacher’s respect for and trust in each child support that fundamental, child-initiative, which is crucial for good learning. A teacher’s inner security and self-awareness, mutually beneficial, form a foundation for caring and detachment.

Teaching young children should be grounded in developmental learning theory; humor is best woven throughout; and the teacher, particularly as a model for children, must somehow unite all these qualities within herself. They form a good mix—with my New Zealand friends’ values of kindness, courage, and integrity—to promote child learning at its best. One need only add the teacher’s joy and frustration, her patience, sensitivity, perseverance, wisdom, and, immeasurably important for young children, her humility.

References

For further reading

WHAT GOOD TEACHERS ARE MADE OF

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs—Rev. Ed.
S. Bredekamp & C. Copley, Editors

This NAEYC publication spells out the principles underlying developmentally appropriate practice and provides guidelines for classroom decisionmaking. For all engaged in the care and education of infants and toddlers, 3- through 5-year-olds, or primary-grade children.
NAEYC order #234/$9 (ISBN: 0-935989-79-X)