

# The Social Side of School for Teachers

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If you are preparing to become a teacher with the anticipation of leading a group of 20 or more students into the process of academic discovery, it is easy to let most of your concentration be focused on academics and on focusing your class on the work. You envision yourself in front of a big group of fascinated youngsters who are all about paying attention to what you have to say.

There is a fallacy in this image though and it lies in what will be actually going on in the minds of those students you will try to teach each day. The fundamental flaw in this assumption is that when you are looking out at a group of a couple dozen kids that their minds are only on you because the class is all about you and the topic at hand in your lesson plan. The truth is that the class is all about each other and the social side of any classroom setting can come to totally dominate the classroom time for the kids.

If you do not recognize or don't know how to diagnose what is going on socially in your classroom, you are working at a distinct disadvantage. Kids are learning a lot at school and not all of it is what you have prepared for them to learn. The social setting in that classroom is teaching them all kinds of lessons that you have no control over. Moreover, some of those lessons may not be wholesome or socially acceptable concepts.

The society of children and teenagers can be amazingly brutal. Kids are far more harsh on each other than adults would ever imagine and the harm that can be done to the heart and soul of someone who gets singled out to be victimized can be lifelong and devastating. So it is to your advantage if you learn to recognize the signs of unhealthy social interaction and jump

in and change that group behavior before it goes too far. This will take some keen powers of observation on your part, an ability to spot social exchanges happening even as you teach and the psychology to know what is going on.

The good news is that as the leader in the class room you can effect change in how the kids influence each other socially. Because you know that social skills are being learned all the time around you as you teach, you also have the opportunity to create activities and opportunities for discussion that can change that social behavior for the better. You can literally teach those kids to get along and to treat each other in a civil fashion and do so without alarming the kids or losing any teaching time that you need to complete your academic goals.

One great way to begin to move the kids toward positive social models is to move from the traditional "teacher talks to big class" approach to teaching to one that uses small group activity, teamwork and competition to not only make learning a lot more fun but to encourage good social development that will help the kids develop socially as well as academically.

You should not feel that by trying to teach the kids good social skills you are abandoning your core principals as an educator. If you can also teach the kids good social skills while you have them in your class, that time could turn out to be the most valuable thing you have to offer your students. When you see those positive social values begin to change lives in your young students you will get a unique form of pride because it was you that made it happen.

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# Breaking into the Working World of Teaching

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In every college in the country there are ambitious and starry-eyed youngsters who are preparing for a career in teaching. At some point that army of graduates will hit the streets to find jobs in the field of teaching. What is not often taught in colleges are the real world skills of how to actually find a good teaching job right out of school. While there is always a need for good teachers the new graduate should develop some skills in finding the kind of teaching job they have always dreamed of. Even from that first job their career in teaching gets off on the right foot.

There is a lot you can do even before graduation to get your job search moving and to make yourself desirable as a teacher. When school administrators get flooded with applications from newly graduated teachers you will stand out as the one they want to call for an interview. One thing you can do at any time during your academic career is to intern as a teaching assistant and volunteer to teach in underprivileged schools.

You can teach just a few hours a day and work it around your academic work. By taking on the working world of teaching even before you have your degree, you will be able to present yourself to employers post graduation as someone who has real world experience in the classroom and “knows the ropes” of getting through an academic year with real students. That is tremendously valuable to a school administrator with a spot to fill because it reduces the concern that a new graduate who has never faced a classroom full of restless children might wash out when the reality of what teaching is really like.

Another way to get a jump start on the market before students flood the schools for jobs is to start your search early in

your last semester of school. Schools know by February or March if they will have jobs to fill for the next academic year. So if you begin your search for a teaching position in March or April, you can often land an interview or even secure a position for the fall long before many of your contemporaries in school begin their hunt for their first teaching job.

Becoming proactive like this always gives you the advantage in finding the job you really want rather than just "any job" in the teaching profession. Spend some time narrowing down exactly what kind of teaching position you want and at what level you feel your personality and teaching style will benefit students the most. You may do much better with young children than with teenagers or you may wish to focus on high school students because they are more intellectually equipped to grasp the subject matter with you. By knowing well in advance where you want to teach, you can target those kinds of positions in your job search and improve your chances of finding that perfect teaching job.

You should make the phrase "leave no stone unturned" your motto for hunting up the teaching jobs that are open in your community. First of all, be very proactive in your search. Just because you are graduating, even with honors, with your teaching degree that doesn't mean the schools will seek you with jobs. Take the search to them before someone else does, in doing so it will be you that gets the premium teaching positions rather than have to take "what's left" after the good teaching positions are snatched up by more aggressive graduates.

There are lots of ways you can flush out those teaching jobs. Check the HR or employment offices at the schools you would like to be a part of and keep an eye on their employment bulletin boards. Use the internet wisely, watch the newspaper and even get in touch with placement agencies who are known for placing new teachers.

But above all, network, network, network. Use every contact you have and forge new relationships to get the inside scoop on jobs before they even become public. Networking is the number one best way to find great teaching positions so you should use it extensively to find a position to get your teaching career off on a great start toward a great future of success in the field of teaching.