



Ask and Expert: What Makes a Great Teacher?

By: New York Kids Club Director of Programming, Gair Morris

New York parents have a plethora of choices when it comes to selecting physically and artistically enriching classes for their children.

Finding the right instructor, however, is just as important as finding the right program or curriculum for your child during these important formative years of growth and development.

Most centers will give you the opportunity to observe a portion of a class or participate actively in a trial class with your child before registering. In addition to determining whether the curriculum meets your child's interests and needs, these sample class opportunities give you the chance to ask yourself these very important questions with regards to the programs instructor:

1.) Is the instructor genuinely engaged with the children?

A genuinely engaged instructor is able to address the class as a group while seeing and recognizing each child and his or her unique strengths and attributes individually. When one approach of sharing information or presenting a skill is not working, a good teacher will quickly find a new and creative way of engaging the children in the activity at hand.

General compliments and praise are far less effective than sincere and specific comments. A good instructor will replace a generic "good job," with "you held yourself up on the bars all by yourself today and I am so proud of you."

2.) Does the instructor demonstrate a sense of joy, humor and excitement with regards to the class, curriculum and organization for which he/she is teaching?

A good instructor finds joy, humor and excitement in the simplest of interactions with children. This starts with the greeting of the child upon his or her arrival and should continue throughout the child's entire experience at the hosting organization. Children mirror an instructor's level of interest and presence and quickly sense when their teacher is anything less than enthusiastic.

3.) *Is the instructor poised, patient and prepared?*

Children thrive in a structured, consistent environment lead by a poised, patient and prepared instructor.

Instructor's should have necessary music, props and/or supplies on hand before the start of class. Instructors taking class time to hunt for tools and resources generate a sense of anxiety and risk loosing the children's attention.

4.) *Does the instructor give directions in short specific sentences using his or her own voice?*

Children respond to instructions given one at a time in concise short sentences. Look for an instructor who gives direction simply and clearly using his or her own voice. Vocal characterizations or use of "baby talk" in communicating with preschoolers ultimately results in loss of engagement.

5.) *Does the instructor provide feedback to parents during (if applicable) or after class?*

A good instructor understands the necessity of engaging in ongoing conversation with parents regarding students progress. Parent communication should include a summary of what skills, projects or activities were covered in class and information on how these learning points can be supported and progressed at home.

A great instructor has the power to instill in a child a life long love of art, dance and/or an athletic activity. No matter how exciting, interesting or reputable a programs curriculum, it is the teacher that truly makes the difference.

Article by: Gair Morris

New York Kids Club Director of Programming, Gair Morris, is industry renowned for training, cultivating and inspiring the New York Kid's Club's expert faculty of children's educators.

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Founded in September of 2001, The New York Kids Club serves as Manhattan's premier childhood enrichment facility for young people ages 6 months – 12 years, offering unique and innovative programming options for growing bodies and inquisitive minds.

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