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Find Teachers With the "It" Factor



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On one particularly grueling day during my first year of teaching, I planned an exciting lesson that guided my students through a proof as to whether air is matter. I envisioned a fun, hands-on experiment with students working together to gather evidence to prove

their hypotheses. It ended up resembling a competitive middle school yelling match, with balloons and beakers and markers being thrown around the room. I ended the day disheartened and deflated. A kind colleague asked me to talk him through what had happened and offered practical ideas for retrying the experiment. He also told me he believed I had the teaching "it" factor — a testament, he said, to my unwillingness to give up or to blame my students for the failure of my lessons. Although I think the "it" factor varies among teachers, making it through that tough first year and going on to grow confidently into a more experienced teacher takes something special, period.

Four years later, my ability to engage, instruct, and excite my middle school scientists has developed immeasurably, and I am completely in love with my job. In my experience teaching in the Bronx and Brooklyn, the "it" factor is all about believing in and being unconditionally passionate about what you teach and about the children whom you teach. What works for the many exceptional teachers I know is being an expert in their subject areas, and also in the children they teach. Children look to teachers for so much more than information, and while teachers do communicate important content, their instruction ultimately guides students to become more curious learners, more careful and critical thinkers, more skilled communicators, and more compassionate individuals. So many teachers bear more personal and professional responsibility than most will ever give them credit for, care deeply for their students both inside and outside of their classrooms, are the hardest working individuals I know (our jobs never really start at 8 or end at 3), and are deeply committed to the students and subjects they teach.