



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEACHER AND HOW TO BECOME ONE

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ABSTRACT

The need for good teachers and good teaching has been, and will continue to be researched into and identified. This paper discusses the qualities of good teachers in relation to classroom teaching. It introduces teaching as involving communication and interaction between teacher and the students, and describes the teacher as a motivator and facilitator of learning. The paper highlighted how to become a good teacher. It also offers suggestions how good teachers can be produced. It concludes that a good teacher or one, who want to be, should have all the general attributes and qualities of a good professional classroom teacher so that they can excel and have good and effective performance in the classroom.

Keywords: Teacher, Students, Schools, Traits

INTRODUCTION

The term "teacher" or "teachers" embrace all those persons in schools who are responsible for the education of pupils or students (Obi, 2008). Teachers are responsible for carrying out teaching. Teaching means a social process involving communication and interaction between the teacher and the students with the aim of improving the standing of the students in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain areas of learning. The teacher gives directions, asks questions and accepts or rejects responses (Denga, 2001).

It may be easy to get into the profession of teaching, but being a good teacher is not easy. Normally, it takes a long time to acquire the characteristics of a good teacher. Sadly, experience does not make everyone a great teacher. However, it is important for everyone in the teaching profession to try to excel, as civilization could not sustain itself in the absence of good teachers. Great teaching demands many things from professional educators including subject knowledge, caring attitudes, classroom techniques, commitment, and desire to make a difference in the lives of young people. No wonder it is hard to find great teachers.

The aims of this paper are:

- To summarize most of the characteristics of good teachers in relation to classroom teaching.
- To highlight the general professional characteristics of a good teacher.
- To illustrate how to become a good teacher and offer some valuable suggestions.

The traits of good teachers

Good teachers come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colors, genders, and backgrounds. Some are old, some young, some serious, some funny. Despite this broad range of individuals, there are some characteristics that are common to them all. There are countless views on what is involved in being good at teaching. Excellence in teaching is not inherited and teachers may be born but they are also made. These

are what some researchers (Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf 2003; Malcolm 2002; Marie, 2000; Beidler, 1997; Young, 1990; Richardson & Arundell, 1989; Suydam, 1983; Brown, and Oke, 1982:1; Bernard, 1965) have found about some common traits of good teachers. Their views come from personal experience and observation rather than educational theory. The common traits for professional characteristics of good teachers are:-

1. Emotional and Mental Stability

This is shown in the teachers' sense of affection; security and self-respect. The emotions of the teachers have a bearing on their teaching effectiveness. Teachers that can control their emotions tend to be very effective. A teacher who loses his or her temper is showing wickedness rather than strength to children. It is indeed, fatal for the children because it could lead to their maladjustment and prevent their proper emotional, mental and behavioural development.

2. Are unsatisfied

Good teachers are good learners. They are always eager to learn new things, expand their knowledge base, experiment with better ways to achieve success. They are lifelong learners and they produce lifelong learners. In other words, the best teachers are always students.

3. Knowledgeable of the subject Good teachers possess a deep knowledge of the subject matter and are able to manipulate, simplify, and individualize this data more easily because they are a master of it.

4. The ability to teach and explain the lesson in a different way

The good teachers are ones that are able to teach to different learning styles. If students don't understand a subject, they teach it in a different way. In the teaching - learning situation, the teacher's exposure to principles and methods of teaching will enable him acquaint with variety of methods to choose from. Ability to move from concrete to complex is a technique/skill to be learned.

5. Wider and Deeper Views

Good teachers try to see things through their students' eyes as well as their own. By asking wide-ranging questions, good teachers implore their students to probe things further, analyze matters more critically, and look beyond the obvious.

6. Clear Objectives Good teachers are well organized and have clear ideas about their daily teaching plans, assignments, and grading policies. Their structured lessons and assignments offer many opportunities for students to learn new skills. Competence in teaching is the result of a clear objective and focus.

7. Objectivity and fairness

For great teachers, all students are equal. They work hard to be fair, empathetic, and encouraging. They maintain consistent behaviors and distance themselves from partiality. As humans, students possess an ingrained sense of fair play. Whenever they were dealt in a manner that violates what constitutes fairness in the situation, they react negatively. Any semblance of favoritism, or lack of fairness, can leave scars that last a lifetime.

8. Positive Attitude:

Good teachers try not to be cynical or negative about their students. Instead of complaining about students' lack of abilities and manners and teachers' long work hours, good teachers accept all of these as challenges. They know that humiliating students or intimidating them is not in their students'—or their—best interests. They help each student find areas of interest to explore and master.

9. Know their students

Good teachers have full comprehension of principles governing students' stages of development and learning process on many levels. They learn all they can about their academic strengths and needs, but even more about their interests, fears, hopes, and worries. They help students learn these things about themselves.

10. Great Expectations: Without holding a grudge against underperformers, good teachers are strong, firm, determined and always push their students to strive for their goals and to maintain high expectations. In reality, setting high standards brings out the best in students and creates in them a feeling of accomplishment.

11. Dedication to excellence: Good teachers want the best from their students and themselves. They don't settle for poor grades, knowing it reflects upon their ability to teach just as much upon a student's ability to excel.

12. Never has enough time: Just about all good teachers are eternally busy, and this is not because of the volume of classes they have to teach. They prefer to be busy and know that the work of good teaching expands to fill every moment they can give it. They are most in demand for committee work, they put the most work into their class preparations. They are always trying something different or else refining what they have previously tried.

13. Think of teaching as a form of parenting:

Good teachers tend to find that the caring that goes into their teaching feels a lot like the caring that goes into parenting. It means knowing when to

stand firm on a deadline or a standard of excellence. They consider their students, like their own children.

14. Discipline: Good teachers are discipline. They do not accept false excuses. They correct immoral behaviours. They are not the easiest teachers because of this trait. Education is, in essence, the disciplining of the mind. A student who knows the rules knows what to expect and knows what is right.

15. True compassion for their students (Care and Concern): Great teachers are accessible to their students even outside of their classrooms and after school. Their concern for their students is not confined to their own subjects but extends to the extracurricular activities in which their students are involved as well. Their good communication with students and parents helps them understand students' concerns and insecurities.

16. Create independence: Good teachers are adept at monitoring student problems and progress. They promote a deeper understanding of concepts and work habits than just learning the curriculum suggests. In other words, they create independence

17. Unwavering support: The best teachers know that everyone is able to do well if they have the right teacher. They don't accept that a student is a lost cause. They encourage frustrated students and make them to believe that they can succeed. The best teachers are there if student need extra help and even encourage it.

18. Willingness to help student achieve: The best teachers are those that manage their teaching very well. They hold extra lessons. They reach out to students after class. They know that some need extra attention or assistance, and they don't act like it's not their job.

19. Humor: Good teachers have a good sense of humor. They make jokes and accept jokes. They are not comedians, but they are entertaining. They tell stories, point out silly things, bring joy to difficult situations, and are not afraid of laughter. They use humor to connect to their students. In other words, excellent teachers keep the students' attention without fear.

20. Pride in student's accomplishments: The best teachers let students know their gladness when they got a good grade or made the honor's society. They smile and tell them that they did a good job. They tell other teachers about how they did as well. They celebrate the accomplishments of everyone, knowing that everyone is capable to doing well.

21. Take risks: They set themselves impossible goals then scramble to achieve them. Academic freedom allows university teachers to take chances and try different things in the classroom. It is exciting to try things that may fail; if they succeed then they have accomplished something and if they don't succeed then they have learnt that they need to make some adjustments.

22. Students' Evaluations: Good teachers provide quick and accurate assessment of students' work. Tests and other projects are evaluated in a timely manner. Without constant evaluation a learning student cannot make the progress of a student who is guided. Feedback is a cardinal aspect of learning. This is done by providing knowledge result to students.

23. Share their experience with other teachers: Good teachers share what they have learned about being a good teacher with other teachers, for a good teacher wants all children, not just the ones in his class, to have the best possible experience in school. He knows that teachers as well as students can always learn from each other.

24. Insightful: A good teacher does not discourage original thinking, but it must be proven. At all times, the best teacher is looking for the student's reasoning, rather than the answer. In other words, for the insightful teacher, student assessment assesses the teacher's performance and provides ideas of what changes both need to make to improve.

25. Listen to their students: Good teachers are accessible, available, approachable, enthusiastic, and energetic, excited and listen to their students.

26. Persevere and Passion for work and life: Good teachers show interest in their jobs and careers by exhibiting positive attitudes to work. They are self-motivated, punctual to school and classes, teaching the students well, relating with them well and motivating them. The best teachers aren't just interested in their subject, they are passionate about it. They are also passionate about many other things. They approach tasks with a sense of challenge rather than routine. They are human, certainly, but they make students to persevere and feel that there is always a reason to keep going. Things will get better no matter how much difficult and impossible they appear to be at that moment.

HOW TO BECOME A GOOD TEACHER

In practice, to become a good teacher you must employ certain attitudes; be flexible, be accommodative, be willing to change for better. You should exercise and follow the following advices:-

1. Have a sense of purpose

You can't be good in a general sense; you have to be good in a particular area. As a teacher, this means that you know what your students expect, and you make plans to meet those expectations. You, too, have expectations about what happens in your classroom, based on the goals you're trying to achieve. If you want the best out of your students, encourage them to attend and be punctual. And if you want your students to become better, more involved readers, you allow time for reading and provide access to books.

2. Be curious, humble, honest, accurate and open-mindedness

You should always want to learn and know new things. It is a strong desire for new facts (Shinshima, 2003). This is the quest for more knowledge. Be humble at heart and willing to learn from any body irrespective of his position or status. A good teacher is respectful and sober and has good reflections on issues (Jegade and Brown, 1980). Adhere to absolute honesty. The science teacher must be faithful and honest enough in reporting data in the manner they were collected. Data must not be falsified by preconceive idea(s). You should be accurate in data collection, data analysis and data interpretation. The role of accuracy in science is of great importance. It measures your sincerity. It is a measure of the

specificity of information that is testable anywhere at any time. You should possess a mind that receives all forms of information. Then you use the scientific methods to sieve any irrelevant information out of the system (Abdullah, 1982).

3. Have expectations of success for all students

This is the great paradox of teaching. If we base our self-evaluation purely on the success of our students, we will be disappointed. At all levels, but especially in adult education, there are simply too many factors in students' lives for a teacher to be able to guarantee success to all. At the same time, if we give up on our students, adopting a fatalistic, "it's out of my hands" attitude, and students will sense our lack of commitment and tune out. The happy medium can be achieved with a simple question: Did I do everything that I could in this class, this time, to meet the needs of all my students, assuming that complete success was possible? As long as you can answer in the affirmative, you're creating a climate for success.

4. Have ability to relate concepts to students' immediate environment

You should master your subject very well and use local concepts to illustrate and as much as possible pay attention to individual differences; be patient, have good foresight and interest in students' progress.

5. Have Command over Subject

Put academic and professional trainings together, you should be versed in principles and methods of teaching, sociology of education, philosophy and some related academic areas, including optional – career courses like language and communication skills. You should have a broadened knowledge to enable you to cope effectively in teaching. You should be dynamic by reading wide and traveling to various geographical locations. If you seek excellence in teaching, continue to gain additional knowledge of your subject and instill this desire in your students too.

6. Know how to live with ambiguity

One of the greatest challenges of teaching stems from the lack of immediate, accurate feedback. The student who walks out of your classroom tonight shaking his head and muttering under his breath about your subject may burst into class tomorrow proclaiming his triumph over it, and thanking you for the previous lesson. There is no way to predict precisely what the long-term results of our work will be.

7. Adapt and change to meet student needs

Can we really claim to have taught a class, if no one learned any of the concepts in the lesson from our presentation? If none of our students ever pick up a book outside of the classroom, have we really taught them to be better readers? We don't always think about these issues, but they are at the heart of effective teaching. A great lesson plan and a great lesson are two entirely different things; it's nice when one follows the other, but we all know that it doesn't always work out that way. You teach so that students will learn, and when learning doesn't happen, you need to be willing to devise new strategies, think in new ways, and generally do anything possible to revive the learning process. It's wonderful to have a good methodology, but it's better to have students engaged in good learning.

8. Be reflective

This may be the only infallible, absolute characteristic of all good teachers, because without it, none of the other traits we've discussed can fully mature. Good teachers routinely think about and reflect on their classes, their students, their methods, and their materials. They compare and contrast, draw parallels and distinctions, review, remove and restore. Failing to observe what happens in your classes on a daily basis disconnects you from the teaching and learning process, because it's impossible to create connectivity if you have disconnected yourself.

9. Question authority and avoid dogmatism

You should read widely to broaden your knowledge. Do not be limited to only one aspect of your specialization. Read other peoples views to approve or disapprove of the ideas contained in the text. Make corrections where other authors are wrong and makes positive criticisms where others have done well. Do not hold tenaciously to old beliefs but be willing to change your views. This is so because knowledge is dynamic. You should not be parochial in approaches, perception and views.

10. Be agile for pursuance of better teaching – learning standards

You should be able to struggle for better standards in your teaching. You should pursue in-service training to become conversant with the current practices in your field. You should attend conferences, seminars, workshops, and induction courses for self-improvement. You should be creative and resourceful.

11. Be comfortable

If we reflect honestly and thoughtfully on what happens in our classes, we will often find dilemmas we cannot immediately resolve, questions we cannot answer. Tell your students you don't know the answer and you are going to find out, so you should meet in the next lesson. But be comfortable, don't felt embraced or tell lies in all the situations and know that even professor can not know every thing in his field.

12. Have positive attitude to failure

You should not lose interest in a matter. Do not feel depressed or discouraged when you do not get the desired result. When an experiment fails, continue to find

out why it failed, rather than abandoning it. You should always be ready to put more efforts into it positively.

13. Enjoy your work and students

This may seem obvious, but it's easy to lose sight of its importance. Teachers who enjoy their work and their students are motivated, energized, and creative. Notice, too, that enjoying your work and enjoying your students may be two different things. Focusing too much on content may make students feel extraneous, misunderstood, or left out. Focusing exclusively on students, without an eye to content, may make students feel understood and appreciated, but may not help them to achieve their educational goals as quickly as they'd like. Achieving a balance between the two extremes takes time and attention; it demands that you observe closely, evaluate carefully, and act on your findings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Professionally trained and qualified good teachers should read all the characteristics mentioned and try to complete their deficiencies and possess all qualities of both the good qualities of general education and specific/specialization attributes to excel in the classroom and teach more effectively. There is no way a teacher can shun his debut of professionalism and jump to the academia. Professional training and academic training should be imbedded concurrently to maintain a high degree of versatility in teaching-learning process. It is these qualities that place the good teachers above other teachers in the different fields. Of course, not every teacher is going to be a skillful teacher for every child and a child spends only about 15 percent of the year in school, which means that regardless of the quality of teacher, a supportive home environment is essential to excellent learning. Over all, the central objective of teacher's assistance to the students is to equip them with the knowledge and the skills that would enable them solve their problems and live a successful life in the society. We have new opportunities to become better teachers every day; good teachers are the ones who seize more opportunities than they miss. Everyone knows that it is difficult to define and practice good teaching, but at the same time, we must realize that no society can progress without it.

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