

From Students' Lenses: What Constitutes Good Teaching?

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Abstract— Teaching is a complicated and a multifaceted task. However, to some people, it may never be a daunting task if they have the passion for teaching. Many admit that it may never be a lucrative profession but the rewards and joys of teaching are innumerable and intangible. Teaching may not also be the choice of those who take education course but they are just forced to take it because there is no other choice. Teachers' attributes are assumed to be predictors of personal and professional success. It is in this contention that the researcher wanted to explore the thoughts of the 20 incoming freshmen about ideas of good teaching and attributes of good teachers. The only instrument employed in this research was the closed-fixed interview that covered both factual and meaning-generation level. The researcher used the informal-conversational interview where there were no predetermined questions asked, in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee's thoughts and priorities. All interviewees were asked the same questions. Responses were analyzed and categorized as ABC's of teachers' personal and professional attributes. Conclusions were drawn and future research directions were offered.

Index Terms—students' lenses, teaching, good teaching, personal and professional attributes

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an old adage which states that "Some people are born to teach, while some others are not." In other words, those who are born to teach can teach well. They are admired by students as the latter learn something. On the other hand, those who are not born to teach constantly strive to reinvent themselves and recreate their lessons in their pursuit of development. However, teaching is an ever evolving yet challenging and lifelong learning environment of which teachers are an integral part.

Teaching is composed of a plethora of multifaceted tasks. As teachers grow in their profession, they shape the minds of others and encourage them to think independently. To become a good teacher, it is important to be organized in order to create lesson plans, objectives, activities, and assessment plans well before each class day. Teachers get students interested in learning by fostering a positive, supportive, yet challenging classroom environment (Linetsky, 2019) [1].

Nasser-Abu and Alhija (2017) [2] conducted a study and explored 2475 Israeli students' conceptions of good teaching and examined the relationship between these conceptions and students' background characteristics. Data were collected using an internet survey designed to measure students' conceptions regarding five teaching dimensions referring to goals to be achieved, long-term student development, teaching methods, relations with students, and assessment. Results indicate that students perceived assessment as the most important of the five teaching dimensions and long-term student development as least important. Only gender and field of study made a salient difference in students' perceptions of good teaching. Implications for the evaluation of teaching are discussed.

The same thing happens with the researcher. In this study, the researcher wanted to navigate the thoughts of incoming freshmen in the college of education in Bulacan State University-Pulilan Extension. Interview was required after the entrance examinations and prior to admission in the college of education, she wanted to explore their thoughts as to what constitutes good teaching. On April 15, 2019, she interviewed 20 incoming freshmen and asked them questions in order to explore their thoughts about good teaching. Based on the researcher's experiences, she discovered that some were forced; they did not want to be teachers. To her surprise, some disclosed that they flunked in the courses for which they applied and so they resorted to education course. For the researcher, such decision was a suicide because they did not want what they were doing. They used the college as the dumping site of flunkers from different courses. Hence, the major objective of the researcher in conducting this study was to explore the thoughts of incoming freshmen about what constitutes good teaching and therefore answer the question: Who is a good teacher?

Description of a good teacher

It is construed that teaching is one of the most complicated tasks. Why? It is because teachers are always looked up to. People see them as models, guidance counselors, surrogate parents and the like. They assume a lot of responsibilities in school and out of school (Rantala & Sala, 2015) [3]. They have to be very punctual intelligent, and responsible. They have to write lesson plans, listen to children, teach well and prepare instructional materials. Even if they have problems of their own, they must teach. There is an iota of truth when

people say: “the show must go on”. Teachers are expected to be beyond having mastery of subject matter (Goldhaber, 2002) [4]. In other words, teachers must possess some characteristics and attributes which may contribute to their teaching career development. However, there are certain time-tested attributes, characteristics, and practices which contribute immensely to teacher success (Carter, 2009) [5]. The following list contains items that incoming freshmen participants have used to describe their thoughts about good teachers.

Enthusiasm, preparation, sense of concern for students, punctuality, consistency, politeness, firmness, control, empathy and effective delivery (Arens, Morin & Watermann) [6].

Personal characteristics. A teacher requires a number of personal characteristics.

To become good teachers, they have to gain some personal qualities. Everyone expects a certain amount of affection in every teacher. Teachers should show love and concern for their pupils. Without a tinge of affection, students may not feel that they are loved and cared for (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007) [7].

Aside from affection, teachers should also show empathy (Liz, 2016) [8]. That enables students to feel that they have concern with the latter’s problems. Additionally, teachers should have commitment to teach or stay in the profession, develop a sense of humor. Personal values such as cleanliness, punctuality and honesty are the ornaments of teachers. The presence of these personal values enables them to exude and transcend the same in the classroom.

Professional characteristics

The following professional characteristics that teachers should possess include expert communication skills, superior listening skills, deep knowledge and passion for their subject matter, the ability to build caring relationships with students, friendliness and approachability, excellent preparation and organization skills, strong work ethics, community-building skills and high expectations for all (Mansfield & Volet, 2010) [9].

Statement of the Problem

The major problem of this study was: “How do the incoming freshmen describe a good teacher on the basis of personal and professional dimensions?” Therefore, it was the main objective of the researcher to navigate or explore the incoming freshmen’s thoughts about good teaching and the attributes of good teachers. It was for this contention that the researcher was inspired to navigate the thoughts of the participants regarding good teaching and the attributes of teachers.

Specifically, the researcher answered the following questions:

1. Why do you want to be a teacher or why do you choose the education course?
2. What is your idea of good teaching?
3. How do you describe a good teacher on the bases of:
 - 3.1 Personal dimension; and
 - 3.2 Professional dimension?

II. METHOD

A. Research Design

The researcher used the pure qualitative research method to collect and work with non-numerical data in order to interpret meaning from these data that help people understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places.

Qualitative research was designed to reveal the meaning that informs the action or outcomes that are typically measured by quantitative research. So, the researchers investigated meanings, interpretations, symbols, and the processes and relations of social life. What this type of research produces is descriptive data that the researcher must then interpret using rigorous and systematic methods of transcribing, coding, and analysis of trends and themes. Just because its focus is everyday life and people’s experiences, qualitative research lends itself well to creating new theories using the inductive method, which can then be tested with further research.

B. Participants

Particularly in this study, the researcher described the thoughts of incoming freshmen about good teaching thru interviews. A closed, fixed-response interview was utilized where all interviewees were asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from among the same set of alternatives. This format was useful for those not practiced in the interview procedures. In short, she interviewed 20 incoming freshmen and asked them questions in order to explore their thoughts about good teaching.

These 20 incoming freshmen were assigned to her during the interview process. They already passed the admission test and they underwent interview process. However, prior to enrolment, the researcher wanted to navigate their thoughts about the characteristics of good teachers because sooner they would become teachers. These freshmen would constitute the first year students for the school year 2019-2020.

C. Research Instrument

The only instrument employed in this research was the closed-fixed interview that covered both factual and meaning-generation level. Specifically, the researcher used the informal-conversational interview where there were no predetermined questions asked, in order to remain as open and adaptable as possible to the interviewee’s thoughts and priorities. During the interview, the researcher “goes with the flow.” In the same manner, all interviewees were asked the same questions. Therefore, responses were taken from students’ lenses or perspectives.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect and analyze data from interviews, the researcher analyzed responses for key patterns. The patterns were identified, categorized, and coded in order to uncover themes. A constant comparison process was inductively done. That is, the categories and their meaning emerged from the data rather than being

imposed on the data before the data were even collected or analyzed.

Just because of the continual building of key patterns through analysis, the discovery of relationships began as the initial observations were analyzed. A process of continuous refinement occurred as the coding is integral to the data collection and data analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Reasons for Choosing the Teacher Education Course

The following reasons were provided by the 20 incoming freshmen; these reasons were taken from their perspectives or lenses. Among the incoming 20 freshmen, the following were their responses:

Freshman 1 answered that teaching is a calling. For him, teaching is an ever-surprising mix of grueling hard work and ecstatic successes. He disclosed that “good teachers are in it for more than just a paycheck”. They keep their energy levels up by focusing on why they got into teaching in the first place. I want to teach children how to read and be literate. I want to help the community. And this is why I want to be a teacher” he said.

Freshman 2 disclosed that he took teaching because “a teacher has a nice schedule or carefree lifestyle will be immediately disappointed. Still, there are some benefits to working at a school. For one thing, if your children attend school in the same barangay, you will all have the same local holidays”.

Freshman 3 said that he did not like teaching but believed that the world will always need teachers. “If you are willing to work hard in any type of environment, you will find that you can always get work - even as a brand new teacher. So I have to learn my trade and develop my craft”.

Freshman 4 said that “my credential will speak for me the moment I become tenured. Even if I do not want to be a teacher, I must love the profession”.

Freshman 5 stated that “the greatest asset I bring to the classroom each day is my own unique personality. Teachers absolutely must use their individual gifts to inspire, lead, and motivate their students. And when the job gets tough, sometimes it’s only my sense of humor that can keep students moving forward despite the odds”.

Freshman 6 said that “most teachers find themselves encouraged and uplifted by the little joys that accompany working with students. Maybe, the smiles and laughter will keep me going and remind me of why I became a teacher”.

Freshman 7 said “I don’t want to be a teacher. I am afraid to be in front of my students, because I never know what I will say or do which may leave a lasting impression on my students”.

Freshman 8 The majority of freshmen enter the education profession because they want to make a difference in the world and their communities. This is a noble and valiant purpose that I should always keep in mind. No matter the challenges I face in the classroom, my work truly does have positive ramifications for students, their families, and the future. I promise to give

my best to my class and watch them grow. This is truly what motivates me to be a teacher someday”.

Freshman 9 said “I feel a calling to impact the lives of students and I am drawn to teaching for the ability to make a difference in the education system”.

Freshman 10 “If you ask me ‘why do I want to become a teacher?’ I want to make a real difference in students’ lives. I come from a family of teachers. Even if I don’t want to be a teacher, I have to like it because I want to follow the footsteps of my parents”.

Freshman 11 said that “I remember what mother told me before she died. Teaching is a highly transferable skill. If you train to become a qualified teacher, you’ll be able to work pretty much anywhere in the world. Whether it is teaching English or other specialized subject, you can work and explore at the same time. International schools are growing in number all over the world. So, I want to be a teacher”.

Freshman 12 disclosed that “I don’t want to be a teacher. My first choice is engineering but I flunked in the admissions test. However, I realize that there is future in teaching. So, I looked for connections to be here in the college of education”.

Freshman 13 said “If I have children already, I can be on the same schedule. Teachers need to take care of preparatory work and lesson planning after the school day ends”.

Freshman 14 stated that “I don’t want to teach. I am just forced by my parents. However, as days go by, I am starting to like teaching because teachers are being paid even on holidays”.

Freshman 15 said that “there is job security in teaching. I know I cannot get rich in teaching because I know that teaching is not a lucrative profession”.

Freshman 16 stated that “my teacher in the high school said that teaching is the mother of all professions. No president can be president without a teacher. We cannot be who and what we are today if not because of teachers. I don’t want to teach, but now I want to be a part of the educational system”.

Freshman 17 said that “teaching is more than just a job. For me, not all teachers are teachers; some are cheaters”.

Freshman 18 stated that “I wanted to be a nurse at first, but when I flunked from the admissions exams in nursing, I just chose to be a teacher because there is no other choice”.

Freshman 19 disclosed that “I choose to be a teacher because of job security. Even during vacation (whether Christmas or summer), I receive a salary”.

Freshman 20 stated that “the rewards of teaching are intangible. It is not the money that counts; it is the respect and prestige you receive from others”.

With all the responses provided for reasons for choosing teacher education, the researcher discovered the emerging themes:

1. Nice schedule- the participants believe in the benefit of a practical schedule. For example, if they are already teachers and have families of their own, they might have the same schedule such as local holidays and

vacation since they are in the same barangay or locality. Having such schedule, they have the opportunities of family bonding.

2. Inspiring others- being teachers makes them aware of their potentials to inspire and encourage others to learn.

3. Developing craft or expertise- teachers never stop learning. In making daily lesson plans and instructional materials, they continue to develop their craft. Some pursue higher educational grounds by enrolling in the Master's degree courses. In other words, once they commit to be teachers, they also commit to be lifetime learners.

4. Personality and humor- teachers who instill humor in the classroom also transcend their own kind of personality among students.

5. Job security- nobody gets rich in teaching. However, once a teacher is tenured, he or she is already has job security because he gets paid even during holidays or vacation.

6. Intangible rewards- if teachers have developed their craft, they gain prestige and respect.

7. Giving back to the community- teachers want to give back what they gained from others. They want to help others grow by way of teaching and sharing what they know with others.

B. Ideas about Good Teaching

From their beliefs, the 20 participants disclosed that the essential qualities of good teachers include the ability to unleash the potentials of their students; to perceive, understand and accept differences in others; to analyze and diagnose student understanding and adapt as required; to negotiate and take risks in their teaching; and to have a strong and deep conceptual knowledge of their subject matter. These thoughts were supported by Luschei (2012) [10] when she said that the potentials of their students should be harnessed and that teachers should possess unquestioned expertise on the subject matter.

C. Description of a Good Teacher on the Basis of Personal and Professional Dimensions

According to the 20 participants, it is everyone's dream to be good teachers, but what are the skills, talents, and characteristics of good teachers? And can they be taught or learned?

Based on their thoughts, these attributes or characteristics can be dichotomized between personal and professional dimensions of good teaching.

A good teacher is characterized by numerous qualities which make it possible for them to do their job well. Without a doubt, every teacher comes with his/her own unique blend of such qualities. Every teacher is different, but every good teacher must possess the following qualities.

Personal dimension

According to the 20 participants, the following are some personal attributes that teachers should possess. In terms of personal characteristics, they shed light by putting these into ABC's of good teaching. Here, they expected teachers to be:

Active- one who is alive and alert

Bold- one who is not afraid to ask and be asked during discussions of the lesson

Caring- one who assumes the role of a mother or a loving individual that is willing to support

Dignified- one who is presentable and with good appearance; not one who is shabby, frowsy or awkward

Elegant- one who is good to look at. A teacher does not need to be physically beautiful. However, according to the participants, teachers must be with a tinge of "class" and finesse

Flexible/friendly/fair but firm- one who says what he means and means what he says or one that does not play "favorites"

Gorgeous- one who is attractive and neat to look at; and not who is shabby or frowsy

Humble- one who does not brag about something especially his or her accomplishments

Intelligent- one who has not only mastery of subject matter but also has the knowledge about matters outside his or her expertise

Jolly- one who has a sense of humor and one whose class is a happy one and makes learning made fun

Kind- one who shows concern for others and the environment and one who is not capricious

Loving- one who exudes joy in teaching or one who shows concern for the environment and one who loves the subject

Mobile- one who moves around the class while teaching and makes himself/herself visible by students

Natural- one who is not engaged in too much hubris; one who from time to time keeps himself/herself away from class. It means that the participants like their teachers to be absent once in a while

Objective- one who does not play favorites

Punctual- one who comes to class on time and sometimes, one who is absent

Qualified- one who passes the Licensure for Teachers (LET) and one who has published books or researches or one who is naturally excellent

Resourceful- one who does everything for student learning

Simple- one who acts naturally without pretensions

Talented- one who has the ability to teach well in order to produce student learning

Unique- one who is very special and talented

Virtuous- one who is morally good and whose morality cannot be questioned

Wholesome- one is with good health and behavior

Xenial- one who is friendly and hospitable

Youthful- one who looks young

Zestful- one who is lively and bubbly

Professional dimension

The following are the professional attributes that teachers should possess according to the 20 participants. Again, these professional attributes are given in the form of ABC's.

Always prepared and organized

Bachelor's degree and pass a rigorous test in core curriculum areas

Communicate frequently with parents

Deep knowledge and passion for their subject matter
 Engage students and get them to look at issues in a variety of ways
 Form strong relationships with their students and show that they care about them as people
 Getting along well with others and not hard to deal with
 Have clear, written-out objectives and communicate them with students
 Indispensable
 Just
 Knowledgeable
 Love for children
 Master their subject matter
 Not boring
 Organization skills
 Passion for teaching
 Qualified
 Respectful
 Setting high expectations for all students
 Truthful
 Understand the meaning of teaching and learning
 Very special
 With work ethics/willingness to change and improve
 X factor
 Young
 Zealous

IV. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

In the light of the responses extracted from the 20 participants, they revealed these attributes in the form of ABC's. Therefore, the researcher concluded that:

1. Some of the participants were just forced to take education course because they were flunkers from other courses offered in the university; some were still forced because their parents wanted them to be teachers. Sad to note that very few wanted to really become teachers.

2. For them, good teaching encompasses from personal to professional attributes. They have the same ideas about good teaching found in the literature. However, what is amazing was the idea of having the ability to unleash the potentials of their students and a strong and deep conceptual knowledge of their subject matter. In other words, the participants expect their teachers to be good enough to dig into the former's potentials by developing the latter's craft.

3. The participants described good teachers on the basis of personal and professional dimensions. Remarkable ideas about teachers' *personal attributes* include ideas about being friendly but firm, being natural by keeping themselves absent from classes once in a while and being flexible by moving around the classroom. The participants wanted their teachers who moved around in order to make themselves visible by all. With regard to teachers' *professional attributes*, the participants' remarkable ideas include teachers having clear, written-out objectives and communicating them with students and teachers who are not boring. "There are no boring lessons, only boring teachers" as what the participants disclosed.

4. Other interested researchers may continue to dig deeper into students' thoughts in order to navigate what constitutes good teaching. They may use other variables such as the *perception* of teachers not of students, *criteria* developed by administrators for evaluating the performance of teachers, *dimensions* of the National Competency-Based for Teacher Standards (NCBTS) or Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author works independently from conducting the study to coming up with the final draft of the paper.

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