

## Review

# How To Be A Good Teacher?

**\*\*Patrick Kim Cheng Low and \*Sik Liong Ang**

**\*\*Universiti Brunei Darussalam; Associate, University of South Australia and \*PH D Executive Candidate, Universiti Brunei Darussalam**

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**Most corporate owners and leaders are successful teachers (also read as trainers) or coaches, and they take certain steps in their own way to pass along what they have learned to their people or employees. Teachers continue to learn. In this paper, the practitioner-researchers talk about how one can be a good teacher; they are asking questions or raising issues to find out more on how to be a good teacher. The various pointers, among other things, include: being an ever willing teacher, applying different strokes for different folks and giving students carrots and incentives (or giving them something to hold onto) as well as applying a variety of teaching methods.**

**Keywords:** Good teacher, analogies, metaphors, pausing, being persuasive, orderliness, S. A. L. T.

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of corporate owners and leaders are good teachers (also read as trainers), and they take certain steps in their own way to pass along what they have learned to their people or employees. Teachers continue to learn. They indeed need to take positive actions to be good or great in teaching and facilitating learning.

The purpose and objectives of this paper are to examine what good teaching is all about, and how one can be a good teacher.

### Being Upright With Integrity

With regard to personal integrity, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) said, "Morality is of the highest importance – but for us, not for God". Being an upright teacher with integrity is not about being perfect as a teacher. It is about being transparent, honest, faithful and committed as a teacher. It also means doing what one says one would do, and with this, earning the trust of others. A teacher must act in the best interest of the students, not for personal gain; that is to teach the students and to prepare them to be good citizens for the nation. It means doing the right thing even if it is difficult or unpopular. Integrity is really a heart

issue. Confucius said, "Man's existence lies in his integrity. A man without integrity can exist merely through his luck" (*Confucius of Analects VI:19*). In this respect, it is about a teacher being upright and transparent to the student at large. A teacher must have the right character and motivation deep inside with the purpose of passing down good knowledge to the future generation. Integrity is really tested when difficulties and hardships come into one's teaching. Take, for example, when majority of the students do not understand or find it difficult to understand what the teacher is trying to teach. The teacher needs to pause, reflect and review how (s)he can make the student understand his or her teaching. True integrity does not take the easy way out for not making one's teaching, the students' learning and understanding the subject better.

### Being Disciplined

Perhaps the single most important aspect of teaching is classroom management. A teacher cannot successfully teach his/her students if (s)he is not in control of the class. If a teacher's teaching style cannot reach out to everyone, the students can become bored, disinterested and restless. One should thus take an extra pause to look out at the class after one has made a key point. Be alert to non verbal reactions that indicate that one has lost one's students (Davis, 2009: 166). It is understandable

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\*\*Corresponding author e-mail: [patrick\\_low2003@yahoo.com](mailto:patrick_low2003@yahoo.com)

that most students have their own learning styles and areas where they excel.

On the one hand, if a teacher is able to discipline the class and can reach out to students by using a variety of teaching methods, they would be motivated and would less likely to cause trouble in one's teaching. On the other hand, the weaker student has no desire to learn because they may have tried to understand or that they do not have the discipline to study. As a result, they don't feel like to study and they don't do their homework. Worse still, parents at home do not have the time to look after and discipline them. Their teachers are too busy and have no time for them. In this way, they do not learn in school as well. And finally, they drop out from the school. And unless their parents and teachers have the heart for them, they would remain as weak students. Therefore, it is very important that the teacher is willing to help these students for they need encouragement, inspiration, guidance and most of all, discipline to study.

### **Being an Ever Willing Teacher**

Do not look so far. It is not without. The 'Kingdom of God' is at hand, within. And if we apply the Confucian perspective, a teacher must be a willing teacher – willing to serve and do one's best (*The Analects*, Chapter IX, verse 25). The secret recipe to great teaching goodness lies within us, our teacher selves.

The good fit is essentially vital. That willingness, that heart and soul to teach, in a person makes a good or successful teacher. It builds the confidence, the enthusiasm and the excitement of a teacher. It also creates much passion to teach, coach and guide one's students well. The teacher should thus have 'a loving heart', doing what the heart is set on (*The Analects*, Chapter V, verse 26; also cited in Low, 2010).

To be a teacher is really not about just getting a job, earning a living or scoring Brownie points with the principal in raising the school's key performance indicators (KPI). The willingness to teach and serve must indeed be underscored. And with that comes the serving and caring of the students and looking after their interests and needs, the very reason for the existence of the teachers.

And when it comes to preparing the course, a good, ever willing teacher, that willingness or even good service fit leads the teacher to duly consider the abilities and interests of his or her students – the teacher would ask: "How much will students know about the subject matter?"; "How interested will they be in the material?" and "What experiences or attitudes might students have that you can use to draw them into the subject?" (Davis, 2009: 139). And the great teacher is often interested in his or her students, and this helps to build the teacher's rapport with students. The students really need to have

something they enjoy too. The teacher ought to get to know them; so, the questions teachers need to ask, "What do you know about your students?", "Do you really know them?" and "Do you know their interests and passions?"

Knowing the students can not only establish rapport but also help to relate the content well to the student. "A key to hooking the students is to relate the content to their lives. Personal connections to the subject matter need to be found, instead of teaching content without the kids in mind – we are building kids, not refrigerators! For example, when looking where things went wrong in U.S. History, the connections with today can be made; we are still vulnerable to these mistakes" (Verna DeLuce, an English teacher, cited in Hawley, 1997).

Undeniably when these are done, with rapport and relationships established, the successful teacher shows that (s)he cares for the students. Indeed, "one of the first things you must do is show you care about the students as individuals." "(Get to know their) names in a warm, friendly manner and with a smile... (know that) each person counts. ...create a comfortable atmosphere; set up name games so they get to know each other too." (Martin Moore – who has been teaching for over two decades at North Central High School in Indianapolis, cited in Hawley, 1997). In this connection, Davis (2009: 278, *italics ours*) has highlighted that students, in part, can especially be motivated when teachers "communicate personal interest in students by calling them by name, initiating conversations with them before or after class, asking questions during class, and referring to "our" class (*establishing rapport and building relationships*)."

### **Being Selfless, Caring and Putting In Much Effort**

A good teacher should indeed be selfless. This basically means that such a teacher should look after the weak students more than the good students. It takes a teacher more effort and energy to teach the weaker students. If a teacher has no love and patience for weak students, (s)he is not a good teacher and to the authors, (s)he is not fit to be a teacher.

A good teacher should be giving all the time and energy to the student; (s)he should not expect any return or favor from the student. That is why one is a teacher because (s)he only teaches and without expectation or return – as if rendering a service. There should not be a differentiation between a good student and a weak student. All students, in most ways, are like his or her children; (s)he cares about all students. If a teacher has a big heart to care, show concern and even worry about all his or her students, (s)he can be considered to be a good teacher (Low, 2010)

### **Learning More Than The Student**

Never stop learning. The teacher keeps on learning. Interestingly, a Chinese saying has it that, "learning is like rowing upstream; not to advance is to drop back."

How true, a successful teacher has and enjoys "the mastery of the subject (s)he teaches, and continues to learn and improve what (s)he teaches" (several interviewees' input; mentioned several times). One will never learn a topic better than when one starts teaching it. And this coincides with what Whitman (1991: 323) has indicated, that is, the great teacher never forgets the teacher learns more than the student, so he allocates specific subject areas to selected individuals, and has them teach to or coach others.

In our experiences, the student's questions or queries normally make one dig deeper, and learns more.

### **Widening Knowledge And Opening New Horizons**

In the Confucian sense, a small person with education is of use to the state; of what use is a tall man who knows nothing?

Another Chinese proverb has it that, "a bachelor of arts discusses books, a pork butcher talks of pigs." In essence, what is stressed here is the fact that a successful teacher must not only continue to learn, but needs to widen his or her horizons. Indeed a teacher or a coach should not shackle or chain up him(her)self to any single idea. There is a need to always try to see things with fresh eyes. If one can do this, one will be able to achieve progress and growth.

To widen knowledge and open new horizons, there is also a need to learn from others (Low, 2010: 682). An excellent teacher learns from others. To a Confucian, for one to be capable, one should study; to be intelligent and smart, one must learn from others. (Zhou, 2005). To learn well from others, one should especially listen; and listen well. Confucius said that, "(S)he who talks too much is prone to failure" (Zhou, 2005: 69). Because (s)he who does not listen, does not learn.

### **Applying Different Strokes For Different Folks**

One interviewee expressed this, that is, "there is a need to treat the students as Buddhas. Show benevolence, compassion and kindness to them".

This interviewee went on, saying: "Peter Seah, 64 years old, a retired Singaporean Banker once related that one day he complained to his friend about his driver who cannot understand and did not follow his instructions while driving his car. On many occasions, he commanded his driver to drive on a specific road with clear directions

yet his driver would turn to the opposite direction that he used to do and drove a longer way to the destination. He said that his driver was 'stupid'. But his friend replied that, 'If your driver is cleverer than you, you would be driving the car and he would be sitting behind you.' Clearly, the message here is that different people has different ways or styles of learning and developing their potentials." And indeed they ought to be treated differently; to each, his own. Good teachers understand their respective students' capabilities and, more critically, guide them according to their potentials.

### **Giving Students Carrots And Incentives (Or Giving Them Something to Hold Onto)**

An Old Russian saying has it that, "it is not the horse that makes the carriage go; it's the carrot that one puts in front of its nose." A successful teacher offers as many carrots and something for the students to hold onto as well as move forward.

Mark Twain, the writer once said that, "I can live two months on a good compliment." Likewise, the teaching or coaching must be full of carrots, praises and ideas that will help the teacher get the students to want to learn what (s)he wants them to. Just like food helps our bodies to grow and sustain us, praises and ideas motivate or energize the students to learn and grow.

### **Applying Dramas and Using Metaphors and Analogies to Enhance Learning**

The carrots thrown in by good teachers can also include dramas, metaphors and analogies.

Talking to various experienced faculty members also prompts us to realize that a good teacher should give special attention to preparing memorable examples, counterexamples, illustrations, and demonstrations. Research shows that an important characteristic of an effective teacher is the ability to present difficult or complex concepts in ways that students can understand, through the use of metaphors, analogies, and examples (Erickson, Peters and Strommer, 2006; Schwartz and Bransford, 1998; Stones, 1992)

As Low (2010: 681) has pointed out, teachers, according to Confucius, should, indubitably not be merely repeating things in a rigmarole fashion, annoying the students with unbroken questions and repeating the same things over and over again. This ordinarily frustrates, if not, makes the students bored, and often they do not know what good learning and their studies can do for them; they miss the essentials of learning, see it as irrelevant and become unmotivated. Instead, he should say in different ways and styles.

The successful teacher normally finds ways to dramatize certain key concepts so they'll stick in the students' brains like a fish hook (Whitman, 1991: 324). The teacher uses metaphors and analogies as well as parallels so that the students understand well the concepts examined. (S)he can also tell stories and color the student(s) more than the deepest dye.

Additionally, an outstanding teacher is "expressive, casual but full of hidden meaning" (Lin, 1994: 248). A good teacher, to Confucius, is excellent in drawing ingenious or meaningful examples or live illustrations to make people really understand him or her. In this way, (s)he may be said to be a good person to make other people follow his or her ideal.

### **Pausing or Slowing Down to Allow the Students to Sink In**

Good teachers pause or have silences, they time them to allow their students to still themselves; basically, to reflect and learn. With a pause, the student would then be able to have the "Ah-ha!" experience or develop fresh "A-hem!" insight(s).

"Learning without thought is an opportunity lost. A teacher should reflect on what (s)he has learned, and in that way, (s)he gains new insights" (Low, 2010: 682). Confucius said, "A man who goes over what he has already learned and gains some new understanding from it is worthy to be a teacher" (Lin, 1994: 203). Reflecting and reviewing is necessary in helping students to learn.

### **Applying A Variety of Ways of Teaching**

To motivate students to learn, successful teachers vary their teaching methods. But whatever one does, avoid reading a prepared text or not having eye contact with one's students. Davis (2009: 281) has expressed that good teaching involves a variety of instructional ways, and these include "break(ing) the routine with a session of role playing, debating, brainstorming, field experience, demonstrations, case studies, or a guest speaker".

### **Preventing Bad Habits Before They Appear**

A successful teacher should nip bad learning habits of the students in the bud (Low, 2010: 682).

Students when young are like young bamboos, they can bend and not be broken. It is critical for the teacher to prevent bad habits in his or her students before they arise. Confucius maintained that he who learns, but does not think, is lost, and who thinks but does not learn is in great danger (Lin, 1994).

### **Being the Role-Model Benefits the Students**

Monkeys see, monkeys do, and interestingly, people learn from the leaders; the leaders show by their actions and ways (Low and Theyagu, 2003). Moreover, Low (2010: 684 - 5) highlights that imparting knowledge is only part of teaching, and this forms part and parcel of the Confucian teaching ways. Confucius was the living example; for Confucius, the teacher should not show or illustrate the examples, but be the example him(her)self. "In life, we need examples to learn from" (several respondents' input), and this match with Low's (2005: 8) words, "when we have role models, we learn better".

### **Giving Choices Is Motivating and Persuasive**

Great teachers are persuasive, and they are influential. When they speak, people listen. Simply being tough is not going to get the students to want to learn. Successful teachers don't force but offer choices, and they are amiable and likable. Good teachers frequently give students choices; they give students options on term papers or assignments, allow them decide between two locations for the field trip, or get them select which topics to explore in greater depth (Davis, 2009: 280). Choosing among options gives students the opportunity to develop skills in regulating their own learning: planning what to do, setting goals, monitoring their performance, and reflecting on their actions (Davis, 2009; Young, 2003; Cross, 2001; Cashin, 1979).

### **Being Credible Helps**

Normally "the students trust the teacher and have confidence on the teacher" (Several interviewees' input; mentioned 34 times). To be credible and influential is to be persuasive, and one can then convince or talk into others, getting them to see one's view, perspective or angle (Low, 2010a). Example-setting also builds the teacher's credibility. Competent, benevolent and example-setting, the teacher grows the trust of the students in him. These are winning ways for a teacher to be convincing; soft power is indeed better favored.

### **Checking Orderliness And Having An Engaging Learning Place/ Setting**

Low (2010: 684) speaks of Confucius, when teaching, was good at leading one on step by step. (*The Analects*, Chapter IX verse 11). The successful teacher checks for organization and ensures orderliness in teaching so that students can easily follow and understand the lesson(s)

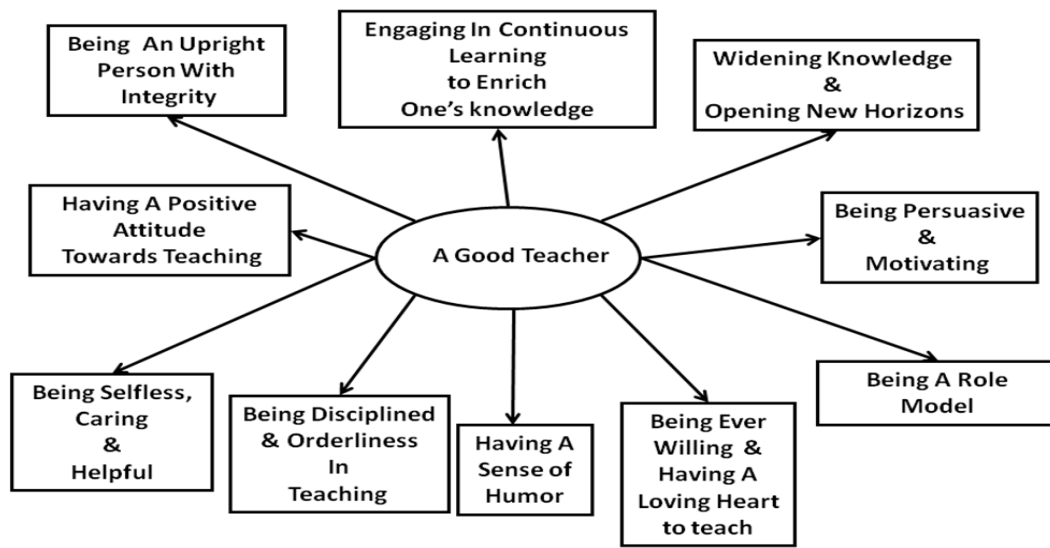


Figure 1 Core Values of A Good Teacher

better. (S)he teaches the different subjects in proper sequence.

Although it is commonsensical, we at most times take it for granted and may even skip this process. Here, we are referring to the fact that when preparing to teach a course for the first time, there is a need to talk with faculty members who have taught it previously, but at times, we simply pass it over. Indeed it is good or beneficial to ask one's colleagues for their syllabus, course Web pages, instructional resources, list of assignments, projects and papers, and previous examination questions, and even to find out about the typical and common problems their students had with the material and any other difficulties the instructors faced. Good teachers indeed do preliminary information gathering, and it helps in topic sequencing, arrangements and overall teaching later. Additionally, the teacher should consider having a winning learning place and setting – what Frederick Herzberg calls the hygiene factors. In this regard, Low (2010a: 45-46; 2005) has pointed out that when planning and preparing the learning area/ room, one should consider S. A. L. T. that is, the:

- Seating arrangements.
- Atmosphere or ambience.
- Lighting: Make sure that the lighting is just right, not too dim or too bright and harsh.
- Temperature: Ensure that the room temperature is just nice, not too cold or too warm.

### Having A Sense Of Humor

A sense of humor can help one become a successful

teacher (Low, 2010). Be aware that one's sense of humor can, in fact, relieve tense classroom situations before they become disruptions. It will also enliven the class, making learning more enjoyable for the students.

It has been highlighted that more critically, the teacher's sense of humor will allow one to see the joy in life and make one a happier person as one progresses through this sometimes stressful career (Kelly, 2011).

### Having a Positive Attitude

Having a positive attitude is life's great asset. Problems are challenges, and they are really blessings in disguise. School children or even adult learners (as in corporate training) can be amazing, dealing with them can be fun; and life can be an absolute blast.

And the authors agree with Kelly (2011) that as a teacher, one will be thrown many curve balls in life and especially in the teaching (training) profession. A positive attitude will certainly help one cope with these in the best way. When one faces disruptions such as magpies in class, too much talking or the likes, and if one thinks positively, one would respond well and manage the class better. A good teacher can, in fact, promote discussions or engage students arising from such circumstances.

In sum, one can perhaps say that there are certain core values that one should possess in order to enable one to become a good teacher. And these values can be illustrated in the figure 1 above.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we believe that the future belongs to our young people, then we have a serious responsibility to insure that we provide them by teaching and giving them the foundations necessary to build a world where they and future generations can flourish. We, as teachers, have a unique opportunity and an obligation in our homes, our community, our businesses and our schools to influence the kind of world that they want to have. And for this reason, even if we study to old age we shall not finish learning. All in all, teaching through various strategies and ways enables the teacher to improve his or her teaching ways while learning through various strategies causes both the teacher and the student to learn in smarter and better ways. And good teachers should realize that variety is really the spice of life and learning, and students indeed enjoy a mixture and combinations of learning styles.

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