

Ideas of What Constitutes a Good Teacher

The first issue that comes to mind for me when trying to address this question is that the response will vary depending from whose perspective we try to define a "good teacher". From one young student's perspective, a good teacher may be one who inspires them and awakens a passion for a subject and its further study. From another's, a good teacher is maybe one who sets least homework and is slackest with discipline. From one parent's perspective, a good teacher will create the environment that allows their child to reach their full potential. From a government statistician's viewpoint, the good teachers are maybe the ones meeting most targets and achieving highest grades. From a teacher's personal perspective, job satisfaction and enjoyment will be important parts in making them feel that they are a good teacher.

As a result, teachers are pulled in many directions in terms of expectations and this leads me to believe that to be a good teacher in general, the key term is balance - the ability to appropriately balance all these expectations (and others) at the right time and by the right amount. To achieve this, a teacher will have to rely upon their ability to adapt to a situation and maintain a high level of awareness and self insight in order to decide how to be a good teacher in each given context. There are times when getting material covered may take priority over stimulating interest or vice-versa. There are times when teacher-led learning is suitable and others when the students shouldn't be spoon fed and should discover things in an exploratory fashion. There are times when a teacher needs to be a friend to the student and times when distance and strictness should be maintained. Deciding when to be which kind of teacher is certainly a difficult task, but through keen observance, awareness, analysis and, over time, experience, a good teacher is one who positions themselves best to make the right decisions.

I am of the opinion that a teacher's primary objectives should be to impart knowledge and skills in the subject domain while, at the same time, stimulating interest for the subject amongst the students. These two objectives should not be mutually exclusive and care should be taken to strike an appropriate balance between "lighting the lamp" and "filling the vessel". Personally, I identify more with "lighting the lamp" - the idea of inspiring children, creating independent learners and providing a stimulating and relevant classroom. However, this may be difficult to reconcile with the need to reach specific attainment targets and enabling students to pass an exam.

Lighting a passion and genuine interest in a subject, while a core objective, should be recognised to not be possible amongst all students, even a majority of them. Simply put, people have varied preferences, opinions and inclinations and so "making all students like the subject" should not be used as a benchmark. What is important, however, is that a good

teacher presents the subject in such a way that as many students as possible can have the opportunity to develop a genuine interest in the subject and that all students acquire useful skills and knowledge along the way. The teacher's own enthusiasm for the subject, continued reference to the real world relevance and applications of the subject and presentation of the subject in diverse forms are all key to achieving this.

In relation to teaching French, this could include covering a wide range of communications, contexts and resources e.g. speaking, listening, reading, writing, interpreting images, native speakers, pen-pals, dictations, culture and history, video resources, audio resources, podcasts, language software, interactive whiteboards, the internet, authentic TV and films, music, literature, poetry and highlighting the usefulness of languages and potential careers. In terms of the actual delivery of education, a good teacher should above all have excellent communication skills and be able to be expressive and convey meaning in a variety of different ways.

Creating rich and diverse lessons with clear objectives, combined with an astute awareness of individual, group and class needs, will lead to a positive, inclusive learning environment that will help each child to fulfill their potential. I think it is very important that a teacher caters for each individual student as far as possible and is effective in implementing measures to maximise each child's learning and experience in the class. This is of particular importance in the MFL classroom as the ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to use it to communicate. Looking at oral language skills for example, a suitable atmosphere in which all students feel comfortable and confident needs to be created and nurtured by the teacher. Again, I can foresee frustration in reconciling this with exam-driven learning and a good teacher will have to be able to strike a balance within this conflict of interests.

As a reaction to a rather off-putting, conservative approach to learning languages that I experienced at school, I think a good teacher should try to challenge and revitalise teaching conventions and inject their personality and enthusiasm into their methods. Keeping abreast of political, social, cultural and technological developments, keeping up-to-date and informed by current research and making informed decisions about how these areas can affect their teaching, are key to this. Given the plethora of superb technological tools available today, a good teacher today should also be fluent and innovative in their use of technology.

A good teacher should also have full control over the classroom environment and lesson. This should be obtained through a clear and fair implementation of discipline. A teacher should command the respect of the students and should also in turn be respectful of the students. Creating an atmosphere conducive to learning is of paramount importance and this is improved through a teacher's good organisation of lessons and materials, mutual respect and the teacher having firm control in the classroom. Discipline is a key issue, but I also think it very important that a good teacher also shows their human side by being understanding,

compassionate, funny and interested in the students. Being a role model for the students, a teacher should behave and present themselves in an appropriate manner. In addition to the aspects mentioned, a good teacher should be punctual, keep their word, organised, polite and suitably dressed.

Beyond the classroom, a good teacher should also be a committed member of the staff. They should be able to work in a team effectively, communicate well and accept and provide constructive criticism. A good teacher should also play an active part in school life more generally. This could involve interest in and work with extracurricular activities, giving support and care to the students and continually striving to improve the school and their own teaching.