

Professional Reflections on “Good Teachers in the Eyes of Students”

Anchalee Chayanuvat, Ed.D., Faculty of Education, Rangsit University

Many of us jump into the teaching career because we enjoy “teaching”, believing that we have a lot to offer to our students. Certainly, teachers know more; therefore, they need to be in command. Knowles (1975, pp. 19-24) defines teacher-directed learning as the learner helplessly depending on the teacher, waiting for him or her to make decision about what to learn and how to learn, all learning at the same pace, focusing on the content and motivated by external rewards and punishments such as grades. This scenario was common even at the second half of the twentieth century when communication means was still limited, with few knowledge sources available.

Unlike what is happening right now, we can instantly search for anything that we want to know and get plenty of responses. Clearly, that role is taken away from the teacher. The most important thing now is not knowledge itself but the ability to search for knowledge and select what is right for the purpose. That is why the catchword of today is not “teaching” but “learning”. If a teacher goes for teaching, i.e., imparting what he or she knows to students and believing that the students can absorb 100% of it, the teacher has a wrong notion about teaching. Although the word is still widely used, the emphasis is on how the students learn. Our job as a teacher is thus “how to help our students to learn”. New words for these roles are, for example, manager, facilitator and coach.

Learning is complex and it is believed that successful learners learn through their experiences which are interpreted and reflected upon (Chayanuvat, p.68). When students need to learn, while teachers should not teach (in the traditional meaning) anymore, doubt may be raised about what then will happen in the classroom and whether we still need to meet in class. The most significant question will be—“What is the role of the teacher? When knowledge in its solid form is not needed, how can a teacher support his or her students?”

The findings of a few studies on characteristics of good teachers reveal that students mostly prefer the teacher’s teaching competence consisting of 1) personal characteristics and 2) teaching quality. The personal qualities emerge as very necessary. Teachers should be friendly, likeable, calm, balanced, joyful and positive. For teaching quality, teachers are expected to give clear explanations, make learning interesting and develop good relationship with students. It can be concluded that a good teacher should not transmit knowledge in the hard style exercise power over the students but be more

humanized. This, I would say, matches what is expected by the Thai National Education Act (1999) and Amendments (Second National Educational Act B.E. 2542 (2002) that emphasize the learner-centered approach encouraging teachers to get to know students individually and learn about the differences. In other words, mass teaching is not effective any longer.

The findings mentioned above are from studies done in other countries with participants who were not Thais. Surprisingly, they reflect similar findings from my own doctoral thesis in which my Thai research participants shared their ideas about what they wanted their teachers to be like as follows: -

The teacher is expected to demonstrate desirable general warm human qualities, specific personal characteristics, accommodating presentation and performance skills, sufficient content knowledge and effective teaching strategies...The teacher is expected to adopt human qualities such as being caring and nurturing, facilitating and being impartial (Chayanuvat, pp. 172-173)

In conclusion, my reflection over this matter points out that as teachers, we should carefully think how to best serve our students in our capacity, especially in curriculum design to highlight the learner-centered approach and how to be good learning facilitators because students are the major factor in the process of learning to become lifelong learners to survive gracefully in the 21st Century. Perhaps, all teachers should take up the best food for thought by Cotterall and Crabbe (2008, p. 2) that teachers can be an obstacle to students' goals of learner autonomy for fear of change in role and authority.

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