**U**niversity of **M’**sila  **D**epartmentof **E**nglish

**M**aster **O**ne **C**lasses **TEFL C**ourses **/ L**ecturer**: B**erkani

**LESSON THREE: CHARACTERISTICS AND ROLES OF A GOOD TEACHER**

There is really no “*secret*” recipe of being *the perfect teacher*. That is to say, there is probably no teacher out there who is uniformly strong in *all areas*. Indeed, the most important characteristics of effective teaching might not appear on any list. This idea is best expressed by de Saint-Exupery (1943) in *The Little Prince*: “That which is essential cannot be seen with the eye. Only *with the heart* can one know it rightly.”

The earliest studies of *teacher efficacy* defined it as “the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to alter student performance” (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978, p. 84).Since then, a considerable amount of research has been done over the years, yet very basic questions still persist. Educators have failed to reach agreement on answers to questions like:

* What is effective teaching?
* How is it defined?
* How may it be measured?

Many researchers in the field believe that consensus on the above-mentioned questions is not possible. What the research has found, however, is that the overall expectations of a “good teacher” have not changed drastically over the years but how they are manifested in the classroom has (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Much of the research conducted has sought to identify characteristics, factors, traits and/or classroom behaviors of “effective teachers.”

**1. What is a Teacher?**

In his book *The Practice of English Language Teaching (3rd.Ed)*, Harmer.J noted that teachers use metaphors to describe what they do .Sometimes they say that they are like *actors* because "we are always on the stage". Others think they are like *orchestral conductors* because "I direct conversation and set the pace and tone". Yet, others feel like *gardeners* because "we plant the seeds and then watch them grow". The range of images-these and others- that teachers use about themselves indicate the range of views that they have about their profession.

Dictionaries also give a variety of messages about teaching. According to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, teaching means " to give someone knowledge or to instruct or train someone"; whereas, *the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* suggests that teaching is "show somebody how to do something " or " to change somebody's ideas". It is because views are somewhat as to what teachers are, and because different functions are ascribed to teaching, that one needs to describe and examine the teacher's characteristics and roles not only in education, but in classroom itself.

**2. Characteristics of a Good / Great / Effective/ Qualified Teacher**

Many trainers are fond of quoting from a work called " The Prophet" by Gibran.K " if (the teacher) is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you the threshold of your own mind"(Gibran 1991,p.76).Such humanistic sentiments expose a dilemma in the minds of many trainers and trainees. Is teaching about the "transmission" of knowledge from teacher to student, or is it about creating conditions in which, somehow, students learn for themselves? (Harmer, p.56).

Teaching is hard work and some teachers never grow to be anything better than mediocre. They  
do the bare minimum required and very little more. The great teachers, however, work tirelessly  
to create a challenging, nurturing environment for their students. Great teaching seems to have  
less to do with our knowledge and skills than with our attitude toward our students, our subject,  
and our work. Although lists are certainly not all-inclusive, one may narrow down the many  
characteristics of a great teacher:

**2.1**. *A “Calling” to the Profession* *(Dedication*) : Effective teachers are driven and passionate about what they do and feel a “call” to teach as well as a passion to help students learn and grow. Without *this mission*, or calling, teaching is just another job—and a tough one at that. Central to this calling is the idea of a positive attitude. Effective teachers recognize that *teaching is demanding*. Despite this, they exhibit a sense of pride in what they do.

**2.2.** *Respecting Students*.In a great teacher’s classroom, each person’s ideas and  
opinions are valued. Students feel safe to express their feelings and learn to respect and listen  
to others. This teacher creates a welcoming learning environment for all students.

***2.3.*** *Professional Knowledge :* Shulman (1986) has identified seven types of knowledge that highly effective teachers must have. According to him, teachers need knowledge about :

• The content they are teaching  
• The curriculum, materials, and programs  
• The broad principles and strategies that constitute classroom management and organization  
• The student population

• The particular educational context they are teaching in  
• Educational aims and values

• Pedagogical content knowledge which is a special mix of content and pedagogy unique to teachers.

It is thus said that a great teacher maintains *professionalism in all areas*—from *personal appearance* to  
organizational skills and *preparedness* for each day. Their communication skills are exemplary, whether they are speaking with an administrator, one of their students or a colleague. The respect that the great teacher receives because of their professional manner is obvious to those around them.

**2.4.** *Creating a sense of community and belonging in the classroom*.The mutual respect in this teacher’s classroom provides a supportive, collaborative environment. In this small community, there are rules to follow and jobs to be done and each student is aware that he or she is an important, integral part of the group. A great teacher lets students know that they can depend not only on them, but also on the entire class.

**2.5.** *Warmth, accessibility, enthusiasm, and caring.*These features describe a teacher who is *approachable*, not only to students, but to everyone who may need them. This is the teacher to whom students know they  
can go with any problems or concerns or even to share a funny story. Great teachers possess good listening skills and take time out of their way-too-busy schedules for anyone who needs them. If this teacher is having a bad day, no one ever knows-the teacher leaves personal baggage outside the school doors. Like the above mentioned characteristics can be also named as " *Personality traits or personal qualities*". To what extent personality factors relate to teaching effectiveness has been the topic of numerous empirical studies. Weinstein (1998) conducted a study which identified 10 characteristics “good teachers” were thought to have (as cited in Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p. 153). Seven out of the ten characteristics related to personality. The Weinstein study found personality factors *like patience, warmth, creativity, humor, and outgoingness* to be indicative of effective teaching.

**2.6.** *Loving learning:* A good teacherinspires students with his passion for education and for the course material. He constantly renews himself as a professional on his quest to provide students with the highest quality of education possible. This teacher has no fear of learning new teaching strategies or incorporating new technologies into lessons, and always seems to be the one who is willing to share what he’s learned with colleagues.

**2.7.** *Good Leadership***:** A great teacher is a skilled leader.Different from administrative leaders, effective teachers focus on shared decision-making and teamwork, as well as on community building. This great  
teacher conveys this sense of leadership to students by providing opportunities for each of them  
to assume leadership roles.

**2.8.** *Flexibility:*A great teacher can “*shift-gears”* and is flexible when a lesson isn’t working. This teacher assesses his teaching throughout the lessons and finds new ways to present material to make sure that every student understands the key concepts.

**2.9.** *Cooperation:*A great teacher collaborates with colleagues on an ongoing basis.Rather than thinking of themselves as weak because they ask for suggestions or help, this teacher views collaboration as a way to learn from a fellow professional. A great teacher uses constructive criticism and advice as an opportunity to grow as an educator.

**2.10.** *Management:*(With-it-ness): The concept of *with-it-ness* (McEwan, 2002) is defined as the state of being *on top of things*, tuned into the teaching/learning environment, and in control of the different facets of classroom life and our jobs. A “with-it” teacher is one who can *organize and manage* their classroom, *engage s*tudents in the lesson, and keep up a fast-paced momentum. Teachers with this quality are ones who can do multi-tasks, use their time most effectively, and adapt to the changing needs and demands of their job and the profession.

**2.11**. *Instructional Effectiveness*: For many, if teachers possess the requisite qualifications and years of teaching experience, being a good teacher is considered a given. However, we all know and work with teachers who have good credentials and lots of experience but have the same *one year* of teaching experience 20 times (as opposed to having 20 years of teaching experience). Knowing your content area and being able to deliver effective lessons matters. Study after study confirms that students who have *high quality teachers* make significant and lasting learning gains. Those with less effective teachers play a constant game of academic catch up.

**3**. **Roles of a Good Teacher**

In the 21st century classroom, teachers are *facilitators* of student learning and *creators* of productive classroom environments, in which students can develop the skills they might need at present or in future.

However, before we begin to understand the evolving role of an EFL/ ESL teacher, let’s outline some of the most popular teacher roles. Harmer, J. states that ‘it makes more sense to describe different teacher roles and say what they are useful for, rather than make value judgments about their effectiveness.’ So, here are some of the most common teacher roles:

Most teachers take on a variety of roles within the classroom, which role do you think most defines your role in the EFL /ESL classroom?

**1. The Controller:** The teacher is in complete charge of the class, what students do, what they say and how they say it. The teacher assumes this role when new language is being introduced and accurate reproduction and drilling techniques are needed.

In this classroom, the teacher is mostly the centre of focus, the teacher may have the gift of instruction, and can inspire through their own knowledge and expertise, but, does this role really allow for enough student talk time? Is it really enjoyable for the learners? There is also a perception that this role could have a lack of variety in its activities.

**2. The Organizer:** Perhaps the most difficult and important role the teacher has to play. The success of many activities depends on good organization and on the students knowing exactly what they are to do next. Giving instructions is vital in this role as well as setting up activities.

The organizer can also serve as a demonstrator, this role also allows a teacher to get involved and engaged with learners. The teacher also serves to open and neatly close activities and also give content feedback.

**3. The Prompter:** The teacher encourages students to participate and makes suggestions about how students may proceed in an activity. The teacher should be helping students only when necessary.

When learners are literally ‘lost for words’, the prompter can encourage by discreetly nudging students. Students can sometimes lose the thread or become unsure how to proceed; the prompter in this regard can prompt but always in a supportive way.

**4. The Resource:**The teacher is a kind of walking resource center ready to offer help if needed, or provide learners with whatever language they lack when performing communicative activities. The teacher must make her/himself available so that learners can consult her/him when (and only when) it is absolutely necessary.

As a resource the teacher can guide learners to use available resources such as the internet, for themselves, it certainly isn’t necessary to spoon-feed learners, as this might have the down side of making learners reliant on the teacher.

**5. The Assessor:** The teacher assumes this role to see how well students are performing or how well they performed. Feedback and correction is organized and carried out.

There are a variety of ways we can grade learners, the role of an assessor gives teachers an opportunity to correct learners. However, if it is not communicated with sensitivity and support it could prove counter-productive to a student’s self-esteem and confidence in learning the target language.

**6. The Participant:** This role improves the atmosphere in the class when the teacher takes part in an activity. However, the teacher takes a risk of dominating the activity when performing it.

Here the teacher can enliven a class; if a teacher is able to stand back and not become the center of attention, it can be a great way to interact with learners without being too overpowering.

**7. The Tutor:** The teacher acts as a coach when students are involved in project work or self-study. The teacher provides advice and guidance and helps students clarify ideas and limit tasks.

This role can be a great way to pay individual attention to a student. It can also allow a teacher to tailor make a course to fit specific student needs. However, it can also lead to a student becoming too dependent or even too comfortable with one teacher and one method or style of teaching.

***8.The Observer***: According to Harmer.J.(1998), we will want to what students do observe what the especially in oral communicative activities so that to give them useful group and individual feedback. Hence, in observing students, we should be careful not to be too intrusive! When taking notes on students'’ performance, have columns not only for what they get wrong, but also what they do right. Observing for success gives us a different feel for how well they are doing. We need to be able to work and observe simultaneously, listening, watching, and absorbing. Not only in order to give feedback, but also to judge the success of the different materials and activities we take into the lessons, so we can make necessary changes in the future. This represents an important area of *teacher development*

* ***The Teacher as Teaching Aid***

Apart from the different roles and how they are performed, we are a kind of *teaching aid ourselves*. We use *mime and gesture*, we are the most important *language models*, and we provide *meaningful input*.

Brown, H. Douglas (2007) mentions that “teachers can *play many roles* in the course of teaching and this might facilitate learning. Their ability to carry these out effectively will depend to a large extent on the rapport they establish with their students, and of course, on their own level of knowledge and skills.

Regardless of the roles they assume, teachers shape the culture of their classrooms, improve student learning, and influence practice and production.

\*\**A good teacher is more than a lecturer\*\**