**A GOOD TEACHER?**

A

As a teacher for the past 20 years, I have seen many good ones, and some, it’s true, fit the stereotype: graduates with good degrees from so-called ‘good’ universities. A cardinal mistake is to think qualifications make a good teacher. When you are faced with 30 truculent children after lunch on a Friday afternoon, they don’t count for much. Take Lesley, a high-powered business executive who I mentored as she trained to be a teacher. She had everything: a great degree, excellent organizational skills and good communication skills. Yet she crumbled in the classroom because she was so impatient with her pupils: nothing they did was good enough. Whereas her employees had tolerated her endless nit-picking, her pupils became demotivated and disaffected.

B

David had a first-class degree. As his mentor, I observed him teach what I felt was a relatively well-behaved class of 12-year-olds. A quarter of an hour in, it was clear that none of the children had the slightest idea what he was talking about; the class began talking, then chucking his elaborated worksheets around the class. Ironically it was his support teacher, who didn’t have a degree at all, who rescued the lesson by explaining in clear English what was required. If you don’t have the right personality, you’ll suffer in the bear pit of today’s classroom. In my experience, there are four types of teacher who are effective: the despot, the carer, the charmer, and the rebel.

C

I’ve come across many despotic teachers in my career. Everyone turns to them when the going gets really tough. They are nearly always very experienced teachers who know not only all the pupils but their parents too, having taught many of them. During my first year of teaching, one of my classes rioted, pushed all the furniture out of my room, and swore at me. I called in the despot of my school, the deputy he, and he blasted them away with a sound telling off. Most manuals don’t advocate this approach to teaching, but I have to admit it can be very effective, even if morally dubious. Despotic teachers often extract fantastic work from their pupils, and rarely have to use their full armory - their reputations are usually enough. They are often highly organized, making their classrooms into small fortresses, and in my experience nearly always achieve above-average results, because they teach the syllabus to the last letter.

D

The opposite of the despot is the caring teacher. They become surrogate parents for their pupils. Many don’t have degrees, and have been appointed as ‘mentors’ or ‘support teachers’ to help struggling pupils plan out their lives – working out ways in which they can do their work most effectively. Usually pupils love seeing their mentors, and learn from them the vital skill of ‘taking responsibility for their learning’ (as it’s known in the jargon). I’ve taught some pupils who were really going off the rails – skipping school, getting into fights – yet when they were taken under the wing of one of these teachers, they transformed and blossomed. Unlike the despot, the caring teacher works with lots of people: parents, other teachers, social workers. What she or he manages to do is make pupils see they can control and shape their own lives. The teacher might mother her charges to death in the process, but the end result is nearly always a happy pupil who has achieved very much against the odds.

E

The charmer, on the other hand, is quite different from both these previous staples of the teaching profession. They can be a disorganized species, living off adrenaline and wits. They are frequently highly academic, and are in teaching to be mates with their pupils, to understand them and play with them. With this sort of teacher, the classroom becomes one great big, bouncing playground of learning. Take Martin, one of the best teachers I’ve come across, who would prepare his lessons on the hoof after reading the newspaper, and would totally change direction mid-lesson if hit by some new inspiration. He was very disorganized, but did everything with a wink and a smile.

F

Finally, there’s the most controversial but often most effective kind of teacher: the rebel. These teachers see school as a place that should aim to transform society, and they believe that our children have been brainwashed by our capitalistic society into making certain assumptions about inequality, exploitation, injustice. They see the classroom as the place where these children can be ‘deprogrammed’ – and make amazing teachers because they are so passionate and persuasive. Even if you disagree with their politics, you have to admit they deliver blinding lessons, whatever their subject.

G

But the crucial point here is that none of these teachers learned their skills by getting a good degree: they learned them on the job. All could improve by watching other good teachers in the classroom and learning from their techniques. However, there are some ‘generic’ traits which should be borne in mind when discussing what’s best for our schools. All the best teachers motivate their pupils to work hard, and assess them regularly. There is now a great deal of research to suggest it is how you use your assessment of your pupils’ achievements to plan and shape succeeding lessons, not your subject knowledge that is the determining factor of how well they achieve.

1. *Are the statements 1 – 6 true(T), false(F) or there is no information about the issue (NG)*
2. More difficult behaviour is often seen in pupils towards the end of the school day. \_\_\_
3. An in-depth understanding of his or her subject is key to enhancing a teacher’s success. \_\_\_
4. Getting involved with those who are close to pupils can achieve positive effects.\_\_\_
5. Teachers who make friends with their pupils are not generally successful.\_\_\_
6. Despite failing to conform, certain teachers have undeniable ability with pupils.\_\_\_
7. Good teachers accept that a pupil’s enthusiasm for learning comes from within.\_\_\_
8. *In groups of three discuss what personal/professional features should an ideal educator have, how you imagine the best class, and what role a teacher plays there. Then you will have to present the portrait of an ideal teacher to the rest of the students.*

The text from *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS, 2014*