



The Essence of a Good Writing Teacher

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Introduction

“*It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge,*” Albert Einstein once said. It is an undeniable fact that teachers come in different shapes, appearances, characters, personalities, and styles. One of the attributes that teachers have is their behavior, whether it is verbal or non-verbal. Many aspects are included in this definition, some of which are: setting clear goals in teaching, building good communication with students, and providing them with appropriate feedback. Dogarel and Nitu (1997), (as cited in Listyani, 2014) mention that a teacher’s non-verbal behavior includes the teacher’s attentive behavior, posture, physical openness, facial expressions, as well as appropriate use of touch, voice, volume, articulation and vocal expressions. In addition, a teacher’s general behavior refers to the teacher’s methods of discipline and teaching. Teachers have their own unique styles, behavior, as well as appearances. Teachers with different appearances can be found at any educational level.

This brief report presents the criteria of good writing teachers that *Procedural Writing* students identified. Only one central question is addressed in this study: According to students, *what are the criteria of a good writing teacher?* Data were derived from several sources. One main source of data was questionnaires which were distributed to 21 *Procedural Writing* students in April 2018. Interviews were also conducted with six *Procedural Writing* students in June 2018. Besides that, reflections or journal entries from the 21 *Procedural Writing* students were collected in April 2018.

Findings revealed that most of the students wanted teachers who could explain the materials clearly as well as explain what to do with them and writing teachers who provided ample opportunities for consultation. This study will hopefully foster a positive social change in education by informing teachers about teacher behaviors which are expected and valued by students of writing classes. In addition, two teachers’ perspectives will hopefully enrich our insights on good teacher behavior.

Based on the criteria of good writing teachers, this study was thus conducted. At the same time, since there was little existing research in Indonesia, the study hoped to add a better understanding of criteria directly relevant to this context.

Literature Review

Teachers are well-known for their good reputation as educators. They are expected to be good role models for their students as well as the society. In some cases, teachers may somehow unintentionally

show negative behavior toward their students. Examples of this unfavorable behavior can happen anytime in school life. One-sidedness, favoritism, bullying and neglecting academically weak students may occur on various scales, and teachers themselves may not be aware of this. There are some cases that discuss students' struggles in dealing with their teachers' less-favored behavior. Some teachers can be very demanding and difficult to understand. As a result, some students who cannot adjust and fulfill their teacher's demands try hard to survive and often struggle. In reality, some of those struggling students never achieve academic success, and they drop out of school (Yu, 2012). Sometimes even good teachers respond to situations in ways that students experience negatively, and the teachers do not realize that students perceive their responses negatively (Yu, 2012).

From Arkoudis and Tran's (2010) study, it was found that in general, teachers focus on explaining what skills students are required to demonstrate in their assignments, but students are more concerned with understanding how they can develop these skills. This means that students are longing for teachers who can make them understand how they should develop their skills.

Related to teacher behavior, Keeley, Smith, and Buskist (2006) developed a checklist. Their study involved 313 students evaluating 3 instructors, and they used factor analysis to evaluate the contributions of each of these behaviors to overall teaching effectiveness. They found that there were 28 behaviors which contributed to teaching effectiveness. Ten of these behaviors related to the teachers being approachable, encouraging and caring, open-minded, a good listener, happy/ humorous, professional, giving constructive feedback, building good relationships, being respectful, and understanding. Thus, it is clear that there are many factors which can be parameters of good teacher behavior. Some other researchers also proposed different criteria. The table developed by Keeley, Smith, and Buskist (2006) is just one example of the criteria of a good teacher that is used to give a more complete picture of desired teacher behavior.

TABLE 1

Types of Teacher Behaviors (Keeley, Smith, & Buskist, 2006)

1. Approachable/Personable	Smiles, greets students, initiates conversations, invites questions, responds respectfully to student comments
2. Encourages and Cares for Students	Provides praise for good student work, helps students who need it, offers bonus points and extra credit, and knows student names
3. Flexible/Open-Minded	Changes calendar of course events when necessary, will meet at hours outside of office hours, pays attention to students when they state their opinions, accepts criticism from others, and allows students to do make-up work when appropriate
4. Good Listener	Doesn't interrupt students while they are talking, maintains eye contact, and asks questions about points that students are making
5. Happy/Positive Attitude/Humorous	Tells jokes and funny stories, laughs with students
6. Professional	Dresses nicely [neat and clean shoes, slacks, blouses, dresses, shirts, ties] and no profanity (profanity = showing no respect)
7. Provides Constructive Feedback	Writes comments on returned work, answers students' questions, and gives advice on test-taking
8. Rapport/ good relationship	Makes class laugh through jokes and funny stories, initiates and maintains class discussions, knows student names, and interacts with students before and after class
9. Respectful	Does not humiliate or embarrass students in class, is polite to students [says thank you and please, etc.], does not interrupt students while they are talking, and does not talk down to students
10. Understanding	Accepts legitimate excuses for missing class or coursework, is available before/after class to answer questions, doesn't lose temper at students, and takes extra time to discuss difficult concepts

In line with Keeley, Smith and Buckist's (2006) table, Harden and Crosby (2000) give another view whereby a teacher has 12 roles, as illustrated in Figure 1.

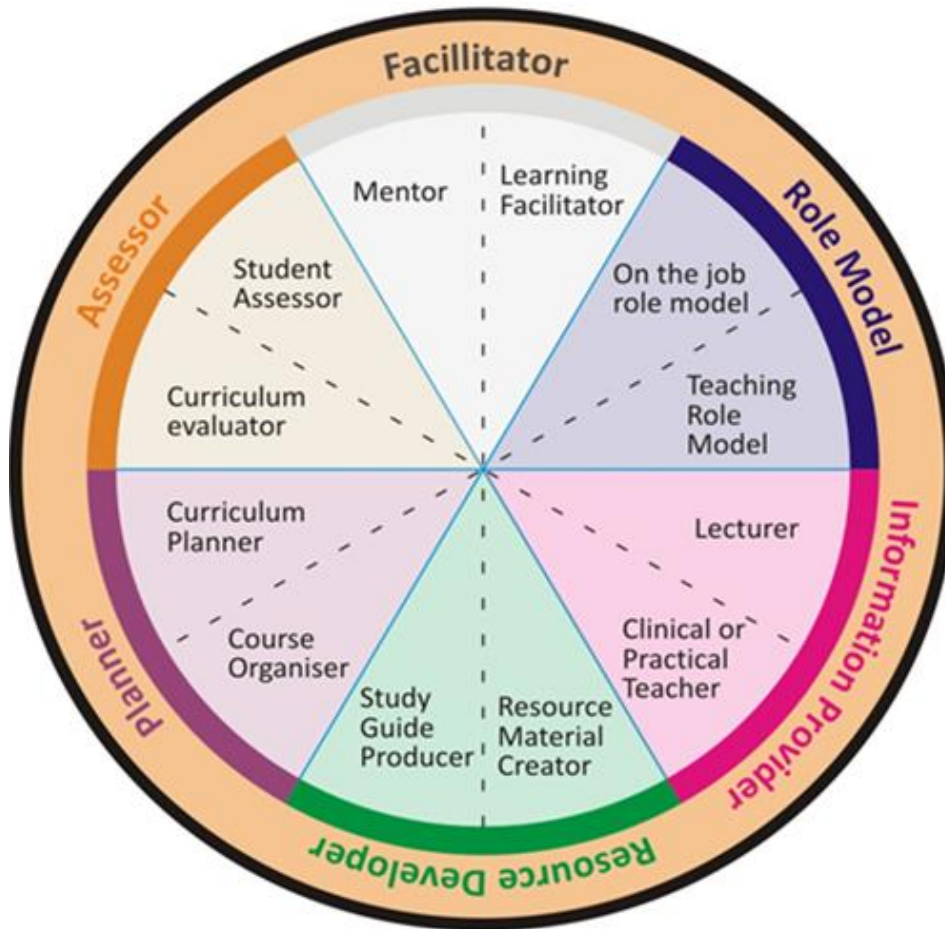


Figure 1. The 12 roles of teachers (Adapted from Harden & Crosby, 2000, p. 336).

Harris and Sass (2009) stated in their study that in some schools, teachers are judged based on students' test scores, with the teachers' ability to raise the scores seen as important. This is reflected in subjective teacher ratings. Harris and Sass (2009) further state that teacher's subject knowledge, teaching skill, and intelligence are closely related to both subjective teaching ratings and teacher value.

In the 1970s, a view of how teachers should be educated emerged, which was known as Humanistic Based Teacher Education (HBTE). It originated from a movement in humanistic psychology and was well-known as a representative of Rogers and Maslow. HBTE was a new view which is contradictory to how teachers should be educated. It emphasizes "the unicity and dignity of the individual". HBTE finally failed to obtain support. However, it has contributed an important point in this development of teacher education: it focused on "the importance of the person of the teacher" (Korthagen, 2004, p. 79).

The controversy between the two views remains the same up to this moment. Korthagen (2004) claims that on the one hand, there is a view that good teachers should have good competencies, that is, a competency-based view. On the other hand, another view emphasizes the teacher's self. This can still be seen in today's teacher education. Tickle (1999, as cited by Korthagen, 2004, p. 17) further states, "In policy and practice, the identification and development of personal qualities, at the interface between aspects of one's personal virtues and one's professional life, between personhood and teacherhood, if you will, has had scant attention". There are spaces in teachers' life, both as professional beings and as individuals which create a gap and need more attention. Both areas, professional and personal, need to be identified and developed for better qualities.

Previous Studies on Teacher Behavior

Yucel (2007) found that teachers' ways of classroom management, in-class and out-of-class attitudes, and teaching methods and strategies had both positive and negative impacts on students' academic success and participation in lessons. Another study by Carr-Back (2009) also found that students perceived teacher behavior as influential to their academic success. In the students' eyes, welcoming and helpful teachers who communicated positive expectations for students' success were considered as effective teachers. Carr-Back's (2009) study also identified teacher attitudes and behaviors that students experienced as disruptive to their learning. These attitudes and behavior included teacher apathy and disorganization.

Related to good teacher behavior, Listyani (2014) gathered data from 23 *Academic Writing* students' journals on the importance of teacher behavior on their learning. Various answers showed students' different preferences for the ideal behavior they expected from their teachers. Among the characteristics of good teacher behavior, it seems that teachers' understanding of their students and being humorous were ranked top over all other desired behavior.

Another piece of research on the reasons for teachers leaving schools, was done by the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) (2008). It reported some important findings. First, Aaronson, Barrow and Sander (2007, as cited in AEE, 2008) reported that the lowest-quality teachers tended to have higher rates of turnover and more effective teachers stayed. Secondly, Goldhaber, Gross and Player (2007, as cited in AEE, 2008) claimed that teachers who were able to increase their students' academic performance stayed in the teaching profession longer than the ones who could not. Next, although generally effective teachers chose to stay in challenging schools, as they became more effective, they were likely to move from the challenging schools to schools with relatively lower poverty and higher performance levels. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) concluded that a teacher's decision to stay or leave a school is dependent upon various factors from teachers' personal characteristics to teachers' satisfaction with the school environment.

Method

This research was conducted at the English Language Education Program (ELEP), at the Faculty of Language and Arts (FLA), UKSW (Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana) Indonesia. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to one *Procedural Writing* class in Semester II, during the 2017-2018 Academic Year. This was part of the regular student evaluation which is distributed every semester by the faculty management. Data triangulation was also done with students' journals written at the end of the semester, and interviews with six students. However, due to space limitations, this brief report only focuses on the questionnaire results.

Twenty-one students of *Procedural Writing* class in Semester II, 2017-2018 Academic Year participated in this study. There were only three male students, and the rest were females. *Procedural Writing* is the second writing course that first-year students must take after *Creative Writing* in the first semester. In this writing course, students are taught how to write a procedural essay. There are four tasks to complete in this course.

Findings

From the questionnaires distributed to the 21 students, various responses were received. There were three parts to the questionnaire. From all the eighteen points asked in the first part of the questionnaire, almost all students said something positive about the way the teacher taught the class. Aspects like discipline, teacher absence, responsibility, readiness, availability for consultation out of the class, use of

time, respect to students, use of materials, linearity of assessments, clarity of instruction, objectivity/fairness, students' feelings in attending classes, enthusiasm, and feedback, were all given high scores by students.

The first question asked about the students' opinions on the teacher's qualities. Among all 18 qualities mentioned, there were four points in which some students thought were not good enough. They are found in questions 6, 10, 13, and 15. Two students thought the teacher was not good at explaining the grading criteria (question number 6). Another two students thought that the teacher was not disciplined in correcting students' work (question number 10). One student also stated that the teacher lacked clarity in explanation (question number 13), and two students mentioned that the teacher was not good at summarizing the materials (question number 15).

The next question in the questionnaires asked about students' opinions on the strengths of the writing class that they attended. Grouped according to topics, there were six major categories of responses of students' opinions dealing with the strengths of this class. These all are related to the teacher's characteristics that they felt fit their preferences. The first is teachers' help in improving writing abilities (mentioned by 11 students), teacher's disciplinary procedures and good time management (mentioned by 3 students); effective materials (mentioned by 3 students); teacher's kindness and patience (mentioned by 2 students); students' wider horizon and knowledge (only mentioned by 1 student); and the last one is giving clear feedback for the students (mentioned by 1 student). In general, all students said something positive about this course and their teacher.

The last part of the questionnaire is another open-ended question, asking what students wanted to say to the teacher about his/ her teaching. Ten students responded. Most students commented on the way the teacher taught them, which was similar to what they expected.

TABLE 2

Excerpts of Students' Opinions on Things to Say to the Teacher

1. In teaching, the lecturer should speak louder so that all students can listen well to what is being taught.
2. Please teach as usual, in a relaxing and fun way.
3. Please keep your good teaching performance.
4. Please make the way you deliver the materials more effectively.
5. Thank you, Ma'am. Hopefully, next semester I can take another class of yours.
6. Please keep teaching us in two languages, so that we can comprehend the materials better.
7. Thank you for giving us a chance to study this course.
8. Keep your spirit high.
9. You are doing a great lecture, Ma'am.
10. All is good already.

Discussion

From the questionnaires, there were three top-ranked opinions which students expressed: discipline in correcting students' work, clarity in explanation, and summarizing the materials. While from the open-ended questions, the most frequently written answers were: teachers' help to improve students' writing, discipline (in coming to class, time management, and marking writing work), or good time management, and clarity in explaining materials.

Clarity in delivering materials is also supported by Gadd's (2017) study. In her article, she studied effective writing instruction for 1.5 years with year 5 to 8 primary school students. The importance of purposeful instructions as well as explanation should be emphasized. In summary, this is the order in which the criteria fall according to most required by students in this study.

First, students demand clarity in explaining materials and comprehensible input. The next criterion is clarity in giving feedback, which may be considered as teacher's help in improving students' writing. The third point is discipline in terms of good time management. Not coming late to class and not skipping class also became a sign of a good writing teacher. On feedback in second language classrooms, Ellis

(2012, p. 538) reported that explicit feedback was successful and resulted in learners' internalizing the target language forms and using the forms independently. Dulay et al. (1982) claim that corrective feedback is one type of feedback, besides positive or approval feedback. The National Academy of Education Committee on Teacher Education (2007) strengthens this idea. They state that effective teachers engage students in active learning, like debates, discussions, research, evaluation, experiments, constructing models, amongst others. Moreover, effective teachers also provide models of feedback which are intended to help students improve because they continuously revise their work until it meets certain standards.

Another criterion of a good writing teacher is having the ability to summarize what has been taught on the very day. For students, this is a sign that the teacher highlights and confirms important things taught. The next point is the teacher has good character. Students want teachers who are kind, patient, understanding, helpful, objective, humorous, and easy going. Physical appearance like the teacher being handsome, beautiful, slim, or tall does not seem to be an important aspect of teacher behavior.

The last point is that teachers should be able to create a comfortable feeling for the students to learn. This is related to a theory in second language acquisition, called *nesting patterns*, that is, the need for a secure and orderly home base, so that effective learning takes place (Ellis, 1990). When a teacher can make students feel comfortable, students feel good during the teaching/learning process. Donnelly (2014, p. 1) also mentions these affective factors in her paper. Affective conditions such as "a sense of class community, self-efficacy and writing apprehension are known factors affecting writing behavior and performance". From the controversies that Korthagen (2004) presented in the literature review, it is clear that there are two aspects that a good teacher should have, competencies as well as personal characteristics. We cannot judge which aspect should be stronger, as further research is needed involving a greater number of students so that more varied opinions emerge.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several conclusions can be drawn. First, students have their own criteria of a good writing teacher. The concept of what is an ideal writing teacher is different from one student to another. The answer that was expressed most frequently was clarity in explaining materials. This is in the top position. The second most frequent answer was teacher's help in improving their writing, or teachers' feedback. In the third position was teacher's being disciplined in terms of time management, being on time to teach, correcting students' work, and returning it. The least mentioned criterion was having characteristics like being kind, patient, understanding, helpful, objective, humorous, and easy going.

There are several ways which can be realized to help teachers improve both professionally and personally. Korthagen (2004) gives some possible solutions to help teachers in their professional identity and mission. He conducted three kinds of workshops which were successful to help teachers. The first is a workshop conducted for student teachers. This workshop was intended for student teachers towards the end of the first year of the post-graduate students. Many student teachers suffered from insecurity and had questions like whether they could be a good teacher, and the like. The workshop was successful on focusing serious attention on professional identity and personal inspiration.

The second workshop is a project with experienced teachers, in which core reflection is a part of the project. It involved primary and secondary school teachers. Edelwich and Brodsky (1980) in Korthagen (2004) explain that adequate attention for teachers' personal ideals and supports from colleagues in realizing their ideals are important for teachers' working conditions. A project with more senior teachers is a good idea.

The third project that Korthagen (2004) suggests is a professional development course for educators. Educators wanting to promote core reflection in student teachers will themselves have to be active in their

involvement in such a reflection. From the participants' evaluation, the professional development courses for educators seem to be able to fill gaps in the teachers' professional development.

The idea of what makes a good teacher is closely related to teacher professional development. Institutions at all levels, from primary to tertiary, ideally conduct workshops or programs with the intention of helping their teachers improve both professionally and personally.

This study, however, is very limited in the number of participants and used simple research instruments. Future researchers can conduct similar studies with more respondents, involving more writing classes and more varied data collection procedures. More complicated research designs like quantitative or mixed methods could also be applied. Hopefully, more extended and comprehensive ideas on the essence of a good writing teacher can be found.

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