In Search of the Ideal Teacher – Students of Education Perception

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Abstract
The role of the modern teacher is nuanced by a series of attributes. He is now asked to be a specialist, a guide, a friend, a counselor, an expert, a leader, a supporter, a facilitator, and, last but not least, a model. Not only does he need all these roles, but also has to calibrate their proportion in the individualized interaction with each student. In this study, we highlight the expectations of future education professionals regarding the ideal teacher and the personal perceived characteristics that endorse students' intention of being a teacher. In this research, 40 student of education were involved. The participants are enrolled in a one year Teacher Training Program. Most of them have no teaching experience, and their specialization fields are diverse. In a questionnaire and an argumentative essay, they were invited to find a minimum number of five features that the ideal teacher needs in order to generate efficient learning, to rise the well-being state of students and to aim future work performance. The group chosen for the study, although unrelated through their work activity and formal education, has a common binder: they all want to become teachers. Their perception is not only an evaluation of the ideal teacher, taking in consideration their own school experience, but also an exercise of reflection of their own capacities regarding their disposal to be a teacher. The conclusion shows a narrowing of the ideal teacher characteristics and an aware realistic exposure of personal self-evaluated features and fears in relation with the desired posibility of being a techer.
Keywords: student teacher; ideal teacher; self-evaluation; perceived skills; fears.

В поисках идеального учителя: мнение будущих учителей

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Аннотация
Роль современного учителя отличается рядом особенностей. Сегодня современный учитель должен быть экспертом, руководителем, другом и наставником, лидером, координатором и, наконец, моделью поведения. В то же время мало лишь действовать согласно названным ролям, необходимо также искать индивидуальный подход к каждому ученику, находясь в той или иной роли в каждый конкретный момент. В этом исследовании мы рассматриваем ожидания будущих учителей в профессиональной сфере деятельности относительно образа идеального учителя, а также личностные характеристики, необходимые студентам для того, чтобы стать учителем. 40 студентов педагогической специальности приняли участие в этом исследовании. Участники эксперимента проходили обучение в течение одного года по программе подготовки учителей. Большинство из них не имели опыта преподавания, разнообразны их области специализации. В анкете и аргументационном эссе студентам было предложено назвать как минимум пять характеристик идеального учителя, необходимых для организации эффективного обучения, повышения уровня благосостояния учащихся и уровня мотивации для достижения намеченных результатов. Группа, выбранная для исследования, имела разное формальное образование, но общим для всех участников было желание

стать учителем. Описание участниками образа идеального учителя не только основывалось на их личном опыте обучения в школе, но также явилось отражением оценки их собственных способностей стать учителем. Результаты исследования указывают на конкретный образ идеального учителя с конкретным набором характеристик. Студенты осознавали реальное воздействие личных качеств, страхов и самооценок на желаемый образ идеального учителя..
Ключевые слова: учитель-студент; идеальный учитель; самооценивание; осознаваемые навыки; страхи.

1. Introduction

The evolution of society and the challenges emerged are topics explored without questioning their reality. Under the evidence of constant change, school also finds itself in front of the challenge to sustain new learning (Simons, Van der Linden, & Duffy, 2000) and to approach new generations of students (Benade, 2017; Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Charteris & Smardon, 2018; Mulcahy, Cleveland, & Aberton, 2015; Ng & Tan, 2009). Of course, in this approach, both the teacher and the student are responsible for accommodating new roles that are no longer assigned with certainty, but are often interchangeable (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Barile et al., 2012; Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; Quin, 2017). Teacher's and student's role itself requires to be regarded with more flexibility and openness (Joldersma, 2002).

Teachrs need to be aware of the changes arose in the educational process, and recalibrate their interference (Slonimsky, 2016). As Durkheim articulated, teachers have to develop a reasoned understanding of the inner logics of new policies and society evolution in order to endorse development (Durkheim, 1956). For reaching positive outcomes as a result for this reasoned understanding, feedback received directly from students' expressed expectations may be a way.

Furthermore, a significant opinion over the topic is welcomed, such as the opinion of students of education, who are in a relevant position: they are students and future teachers in the same time. Their opinion can be, as Rowan, Correnti, and Miller (2002) stated, a valuable *black box.*

Various studies try to sketch the ideal teacher image. Of course, the ideal is strongly linked to a specific period of time (Haamer, Lepp, & Reva, 2012). We can seize an evolution in the closeness, familiarity, friendship, and affection that characterizes the current student-teacher relationship (Claessens et al., 2017; Nakamura, 2008; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). We can also mention students' high expectation concerning the teacher approach that can genuine endorse learning (Randazzo, Opara, Oguzor, Nosike, & Njoku, 2011; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011). Last, but not least, we need to remind the general struggle of the educational system to provide effective learning that directly aims future work performance and in the same time cares for the wellbeing state of students (Goldin & Katz, 2018; Hopper, 2018). In this configuration, the teacher still remains an important actor.

In a study conducted by Kozikoğlu (2017), future education professionals described the ideal teacher through this categories: communication skills, student centeredness, innovativeness, sensitivity, humaneness/joviality, teaching pedagogical skills, leadership/guidance, professional content knowledge, personal values, professional values (p. 71). The first three cognitive categories attached to the ideal teacher are teaching pedagogical skills, humaneness/joviality, and professional content knowledge.

Arnon and Reichel (2007) separate that two major categories regarding the perception of the ideal teacher: (1) personal qualities, and (2) knowledge of the subject taught as well as didactic knowledge.

A good teacher has human relations skills, knowledge of the subject, is a facilitator of students' intellectual development, is respectful, but also dynamic lecturer, is a good

listener, loves the subject taught, establishes links between related fields, and is able to teach others how to learn for themselves (Rusu, Ùoitu, & Panaite, 2012). Also, teachers shouldn't a superiority attitude (Vlad, 2014).

The differences between the male and female perception in defining the ideal teacher were as well investigated. The keywords encountered in the female description were "understanding", "model", "conscientious", "stable", "patient", "knowledgeable", "beloved teacher" and "idealist". Male students offered "examples of human", "success" and "judge" as metaphors for the ideal teacher (Sezgin Nartgün, Özen AssocProf Abant, & Abant, 2015).

Telli, Den Brok, and Çakiroğlu (2008) find a commune definition of the ideal teacher from both teachers and students perception, that is "a person who guides students, motivates and encourages them, gives confidence, has a tendency to build more positive relationship and has earned respect from students" (p.149).

Is not enough to expose the expectations regarding the ideal teacher. Is as well important to place the right combination of roles in relation with each and all students, in order to reach the wellbeing state, of both students and teachers, so desired in efficient learning (Roffey, 2012). Learning has to be memorable to the extent of the workplace where all knowledge and skills overflow. The quality of being memorable depends on the teacher's touch, so we are back to ideal teacher characteristics that we will discuss further on.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on teacher's challenges in managing new learning and the multitude of fused roles to support effective learning, the wellbeing of students, and future work performance. The perspective of a varied group of future education professionals is analyzed. Reflecting on their own school experience and focusing on the desire to be a teacher, the participants were invited to find those characteristics needed for the contemporary teacher to optimally calibrate the educational process with all the incomes and outcomes. Also, students are invited to reflect on their own perceived skills that recommend them for this profession and their fears regarding the future teacher role.

The contribution reported by this study to the literature is overlapping expectations regarding the ideal teacher with the personal perceived qualities that recommend students of education to be teachers. The overlapping characteristics are to be considered dependent variables in connection with future work performance and students' wellbeing.

3. Research Questions

The questions of the research are the following:
• What are the characteristics of the ideal teacher who manages to provide effective learning, cares for the wellbeing state of students, and aims future work performance?
• What are the self-evaluated characteristics of future teachers regarding the same issues?
• What are their fears regarding entering the educational system?

4. Methodological Framework

Participants

In this study were involved 40 male and female students, aged between 24 and 50. Participants are enrolled in the Teacher Training Program to receive a teaching certificate in their field of specialization (according to their Bachelor's degree). With this certificate, they will be able to teach up to the 10th grade (e.g. an Economics graduate can teach up to the 10th-grade disciplines under the curriculum of Economics – Accountancy, Management, and Financial Education).

Procedure

The study is based on two research tools: a questionnaire and an argumentative essay. Both instruments are used for qualitative analysis. The first was used to collect factual data, but also other information to describe the group of respondents as accurately and relevant as possible in relation to the purpose of the study. The survey was distributed online and contains both open and closed questions. We mention that the questionnaire seeks to detach descriptive aspects and captures only perceptual issues. Reliability was checked by applying the questionnaire to another group of 10 students. After this, two questions were rephrased, in order to collect one word answers.

The second research tool, namely the argumentative essay, was requested at the end of the first semester of the Teacher Training Program that participants are enrolled, in order to get a teacher qualification. The essay had two requirements: (1) length – maximum two pages, (2) finding at least five characteristics necessary to contemporary teachers to support efficient learning, the general wellbeing of students and develop knowledge and skills that will help students perform at their future workplace.

Coding

Questionnaires and essays were coded using name initial, and sex. Data was analyzed using NVivo 10.

Ethics

Concerning research ethics, we mention that the participants were first presented the purpose of the study and received information about confidentiality. Simultaneously with providing the completed materials (questionnaire and essay), the respondents expressed their agreement to take part in the research. Names used to expose personal comments in this study are not real.

5. Results

All the applicants have higher education in various fields such as: Socio-Human Sciences, Theology, Law, Medicine, Economics, Literacy and Arts, Engineering, Agricultural Sciences, Food Industry and Environmental Protection, History and Philosophy, Journalism, and Biology.

Students are employed, but a very small proportion of them work in the education system (under 3%). The ones that have o job in the education are unqualified.

Most of respondents work in the area in which they specialized according to their Bachelor's degree (67%) and have an average working experience of 11 years. The information is to be mentioned because, already having a job in the field of knowledge, when asked to identify those features that a teacher should have in order help students learn effectively, gain knowledge and practice skills that would support their prospect activity in the workplace, their vision is more likely to be pragmatic. Participants have the following jobs: political analyst, singer, expert legal adviser, mediator, vicar, counselor, physician, economist, restorer, engineer, public relations specialist, NGO coordinator, translator, customer service specialist, social worker, and coach.

Questioned about the level of financial satisfaction that the current job brings, on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (strong satisfaction = 5, and low satisfaction = 1), the group has an average level 3.14 of contentment. They consider that money also contributes, on a scale of 1 to 5, to work motivation in a medium to high average (3.47). However, 76% of the participants would change their jobs for a less paid one that would bring more fulfillment in their lives.

When inquired about the reason they chose to enroll themselves the Teacher Training Program, the answers outlined below were given. All answers presented are personal comments.

To apply for a job in education.

To be a qualified professor of Religion.

I want to become a teacher of Physical Education and Sports.

To learn new things about teaching.

To be able to teach in the future.

The need for communication and personal optimization, the love for humans and the desire to find a way to effectively help them, the need to implement new values for human well-being

For in-depth learning

For personal development

Adapt the way of working with beneficiaries and community members to the standards needed to establish long-lasting and sustainable partnership relationships.

I would like to be able to offer to others what I know.

To grow professionally and improve my income.

The responses have two main lines: the desire to qualify in education (to teach as a qualified professional) and the desire for personal development. Therefore, the participants are aware of (1) the benefits of being a qualified teacher and (2) the added value that participating in Teacher Training Program brings in their soft skills area.

Questioned to what extent are useful the courses in the Teacher Training Program in reaching their expectations, concerning both qualification and personal development, participants provide a high average score of 4.52 (on a scale of minimum 1 to maximum 5 usefulness).

The purpose of presenting all the information so far was to add relevance to participants' opinion. The students enrolled in the Teacher Training Program, although working in different fields and having different Bachelor diplomas, want to enter the educational system and see the program not only as an opportunity for professional qualification but also as a personal development chance.

The purpose of the study was to find a set of personal and professional characteristics required, from the perspective of the students described, to the *ideal teacher*. The most common features mentioned in the argumentative essays are illustrated in Figure 1.

Fig.1. *Characteristics of the ideal teacher*

Top 10 features encountered in the argumentative essays are presented in Table 1. The characteristic most used to describe de ideal teacher was *model.* The word is used in direct meaning or in phrases from which it emerges the idea of being a model for pupils.

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A teacher, as Victoria says, ¢*should be one who has discovered himself, who has worked with himself amply enough to be a model for students¢.* Adrian articulates that ¢*children will not learn to be moral unless, in front of them, the model promotes moral norms through their own attitude/behavior/example¢.*

Students participating in the study rank second the pedagogical training of teachers. Elena states that ¢*One of the first prerequisites for being a good teacher is pedagogical knowledge. Having access to pedagogical knowledge, the teacher learns how to immediately choose the best solutions to the problems that arise in classroom activity¢.*

Table 1. **Top 10 must-have for being the ideal teacher**

Features	Frequency in text
model	46
good pedagogue	45
empathetic	31
communicative	28
in continuous improvement	26
active listener	24
correct	19
good psychologist	12
open to new ideas	12
convincing	11

¢*The observation spirit, the pedagogical craftsmanship, the pedagogical tact are those causal variables, responsible for the success or failure of learning¢,* adds Dan.

Also, according to the participants, empathy is mandatory for being an ideal teacher. Gabriela states a definition of empathy: ¢*Being a good teacher implies having certain social skills to enter the inner life of the group of students, empathetic, to understand the children and to look at the world through their eyes¢.*

Communication is perceived as an important variable in relation with students. Here are some personal comments on this topic.

¢*An authentic teaching style means that teachers use the time before and after classes communicating with students about outside school-related topics, sharing experiences and being open to dialogue, to the extent that these behaviors fit their personality traits¢.* (Andrei, personal comment)

Never stop learning is, in the perception of respondents, another ideal characteristic for teachers. Vlad articulates:

The teacher must have a constant desire to learn, it goes hand in hand with being adaptable. Learning is always a process for life. Being a modern teacher means that the teacher is also a student in the same way that the teacher is a guide. There is always something new to learn or think about when you are a teacher.

Another invitation for the participants was to express their own characteristics that recommend them for being a teacher. Table 2 presents the self-evaluation in relation to respondents desire to be a teacher.

Table 2. **Personal features as a recommendation for being a teacher**

Personal features	Overlapping features	Ideal teacher features
calm	able to work with people	active listener
competitive	charismatic	balanced
conscientious	COMMUNICATIVE	conflict manager
creative	CORRECT	convincing
determined	devoted	cooperatives
diligent	EMPATHETIC	discreet
disciplined	equidistant	good pedagogue
enthusiastic	experienced	guidance counselor
loving people	flexible	leader
modest	GOOD PSYCHOLOGIST	in continuous improvement
objective	intelligent	informed
organized	involved	inventive
perfectionist	optimistic	jovial
perseverant	passionate	mediator
responsible	patient	model
sociable	persevering	motivated
tenacious	seriously	objective
with ludic spirit	tolerant	open to new ideas
with tact	with a sense of humor	professional
		punctual
		vertical

In the essays, 41 characteristics were found with recurrence in describing the ideal teacher. In the personal description and the request to outcome those characteristics that recommend each applicant to be a teacher, participants described themselves using with recurrence an approximately equal number of features, respectively 38. Of these, 19 characteristics (46%) are common to those used to describe the ideal teacher (Column B, Table 2). From the Top 10 must have in order to be an ideal teacher (Table 1), participants consider that they have number 3, 4, 7, and 8 (capitalized words in Column B) respectively empathetic, communicative, correct, and good psychologist.

6. Discussion

We consider interesting to add up to into discussion another set of answers that will help understand the difference between the characteristics perceived as necessary for the ideal teacher and the ones owned by students of education.

Participants were asked to name de greatest fear concerning teaching and entering the educational system. The following answers were given, and their recurrence is illustrated in Table3.

Table 3. **Fears concerning teaching**

Fear concerning teaching	Frequency
System bureaucracy	20
I will not adapt to the culture of the system as perceived now	6
I feel that I do not master the specialty I have to teach	4
Interaction with parents	4
That study discipline will disappear	2
Security issues in relation to students	2
I will not have a salary to secure my desired living standard	1
I do not know the curricular documents	1

Going back to the top ideal characteristics that the participants consider they don't have and connecting them with their fears, we can conclude that one can't be a good convincing pedagogue, in continuous improvement, if worries about system bureaucracy, does not master the specialty that has to teach, and does not know the curricular documents. Similar personal qualities were also reported in a study conducted by Arnon and Reichel (2007). A model that has reservations regarding the interaction with parents is hard to design. And being open to new ideas is hard when fearing to adapt to the culture of the system.

7. Conclusion

The diversity of specialization fields broadens the description of the ideal teacher and provides an extensive picture of the subject of the research.

There is an ideal teacher, but it is set up in a matrix of personal perspective and differs from student to student, as reported by Beauchamp and Thomas (2010). Of the desirable characteristics required to the ideal teacher, the students questioned, future teachers themselves, consider that they have 46%. We can perceive a connection between these features and work performance, for the participants already working in their field of specialization, so they are more able to assess the specific approach needed in order to teach effectively.

And out of the top 10 most important ideal characteristics, students of education consider they have four: empathetic, communicative, correct, and good psychologist. The rest of top ideal characteristics are connected to the expressed fears concerning entering the educational system, namely bureaucracy, not mastering the specialty to be thought, worrying about the interaction with parents, and fearing to adapt to the culture of the system.

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