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What a Teacher Should not be Like

Abstract

The teacher's misbehaviour has an adverse influence on students' motivation and adjustment in school. It even has more permanent effects on students than the teacher's good behaviour. The objective of this study was to apply Korthagen's model of levels of change in exploring teachers' most unacceptable characteristics from the perspective of students (n = 158), teachers (n = 78) and parents (n = 148), and to reveal possible differences depending on primary and secondary school and the length of teachers' experience. The listed characteristics fit Korthagen's model mostly in the levels of mission, behaviour and identity. Some differences were found between primary and secondary school, as well as ones related to teachers' length of experience.

Keywords: *bad teachers, unacceptable characteristics, students, parents*

Introduction

A good teacher should have positive and good personality traits along with general and professional competences (e.g., Symanyuk & Pecherkina, 2016). From a social point of view, the teacher should be a model citizen. Besides creating favourable conditions for teaching and learning, teachers often provide a safe environment for students' problems not related to school. Teachers also help students at risk or with difficulties in avoiding exclusion in the school context (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015). Students often suggest that teachers' personal characteristics are more important than their pedagogical skills (Balli, 2014). However, students are exposed to and influenced by teachers who do not demonstrate only desirable

characteristics. Teachers' misbehaviour generates a stressful, aggressive and frustrating atmosphere, which worsens students' adaptation to the school environment (Wang, Gibson, & Slate, 2007; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Dilekmen, 2011), motivation (Wang, Gibson, & Slate, 2007) and self-esteem (Gendron, Williams, & Guerra, 2011). Even more relevant are findings that teachers' misbehaviour has more permanent effects on students than teachers' good behaviour (Otgaar, Candel, & Merckelbach, 2008).

Research Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this research was to combine perspectives of the most important stakeholders in the formal educational process – students, teachers and parents, in revealing what characteristics they found crucially unacceptable in good teachers. The framework for the analysis was Korthagen's (2004) model of six *levels of change*. The core level is *mission*, which refers to the meaning of one's own existence in a larger life perspective. The next is *identity*, which tackles how teachers see their professional role. Then there are *beliefs* teachers have related to teaching and learning. The next level addresses teachers' *competences*, which embrace knowledge, skills and attitudes, as a potential for behaviour. Then comes teachers' actual performance, i.e., the level of *behaviour*. The outermost level is *environment*, which involves the class, students or school.

The objective of this research was to apply Korthagen's model of levels of change in exploring: 1) the most unacceptable characteristics of a good teacher from the perspective of students, teachers and parents; 2) possible differences in these characteristics depending on primary and secondary school; and 3) possible differences in these characteristics depending on the length of teachers' experience in teaching.

Methodology

There were 384 participants in the research from various parts of Croatia, divided into three groups: 1) 158 students, 7 to 18 years old (M = 14.40, SD = 3.02), 98 girls and 59 boys; 81 students were from primary (7–14 years old) and 77 from secondary schools (15–18 years). 2) 78 teachers 26 to 77 years old (M = 39.43, SD = 10.38), 21 men and 57 women; one third was employed in secondary, and two thirds in primary schools. 3) 148 parents, 72 mothers and 76 fathers, 29 to 62 years old (M = 42.81, SD = 5.97); approximately half of them had children in primary, and half in secondary school.

Besides age and gender, the variables included in this research were: 1) *The most unacceptable characteristics a good teacher should not have*, which was asked as an open question: What are the three most important characteristics a good teacher should never have? Please explain. 2) The variable *school* referred to the primary or secondary school that the students went to, or the teachers taught in or the parents' children attended. 3) *The length of teaching experience* divided teachers into three groups: a) up to six years (n = 27); b) 7–14 years (n = 25); and c) 15 years and more (n = 26).

The presented research was a part of a larger survey related to teachers' competences and motivation for learning. Besides the scientific objectives, it also had educational ones. In order to explore, more in depth, students', teachers' and parents' expectations of teachers' characteristics, university students that studied to become teachers of humanities and music had to find and interview: one primary and one secondary school student, one primary or secondary school teacher, one mother and one father of a primary or secondary school student. The authors categorised collected answers. Besides more insight into the topics, the students received course credits.

Results

Related to the first objective, the most unacceptable characteristics of a good teacher were listed from the perspective of the students, teachers and parents. They offered three answers and then a joint list was made. It comprised 83 characteristics. To identify the most unacceptable characteristics from the three perspectives, five most frequent answers were ranked for each group (Table 1).

Table 1. The most unacceptable teacher characteristics from three perspectives

Rank	Frequencies		
	Students *(n = 158)*	Teachers *(n = 78)*	Parents *(n = 148)*
1	unfair, angry, biased *(45)*	unfair, impatient *(20)*	unfair *(47)*
2	severe *(38)*	biased *(17)*	impatient *(43)*
3	impatient *(32)*	angry *(15)*	angry *(36)*
4	insulting *(31)*	arrogant *(14)*	arrogant, biased *(29)*
5	arrogant *(21)*	intolerant *(11)*	insulting *(21)*

For the second objective, ranks of teachers' unacceptable characteristics were compared between primary and secondary school from the students', teachers' and parents' perspective (Table 2).

Table 2. The most unacceptable teacher characteristics regarding primary and secondary school

	Frequencies					
	Students		Teachers		Parents	
Rank	Primary school (n = 81)	Secondary school (n = 77)	Primary school (n = 45)	Secondary school (n = 25)	Primary school (n = 72)	Secondary school (n = 65)
1	severe, angry (30)	biased (25)	unfair, impatient (13)	biased (8)	unfair (26)	impatient (21)
2	unfair (23)	insulting (18)	angry (10)	unfair (7)	impatient (24)	unfair (20)
3	biased (20)	arrogant, impatient, angry (15)	biased, intolerant, insulting (8)	arrogant (5)	angry (21)	biased (16)
4	impatient (17)	unfair (12)	arrogant (6)	impatient, incompetent, angry (4)	arrogant, severe (12)	arrogant (15)
5	insulting (13)	incompetent (10)	superficial, unapproachable, permissive (5)	severe, intolerant, insecure (3)	biased (11)	angry (12)

For the third objective, ranks of teachers' unacceptable characteristics were compared regarding the length of teachers' experience (Table 3).

Table 3. The most unacceptable teacher characteristics regarding the length of teaching

	Frequencies		
Rank	Up to 6 years of experience (n = 26)	7–14 years of experience (n = 25)	15 and more years of experience (n = 26)
1	arrogant (8)	impatient (7)	unfair (11)
2	biased (6)	biased, angry (6)	impatient (8)
3	impatient (5)	unfair (5)	biased, arrogant, angry, incompetent, intolerant (5)
4	angry, unapproachable, unfair, insulting (4)	superficial, uninterested, intolerant, insulting (4)	severe, permissive (3)
5	severe, uninteresting, uninterested, bitter (3)	unapproachable, permissive (3)	superficial, disorganised, vindictive, inconsistent, insecure (2)

Discussion

Students', teachers' and parents' perspective

The joint list of five most frequently chosen characteristics from the students', teachers' and parents' perspectives shows great overlapping (Table 1), most likely caused by the fact that all of them share the experience of being a student. They all agree that a good teacher must not be *unfair* or *unjust* as the top unwanted characteristic. This is supported in previous findings (Raufelder et al., 2016). Students' consideration of unfair treatment negatively influences their identification in the class, learning motivation and dialogue with teachers (Berti, Molinari, & Speltini, 2010). Unfairness largely implies unfair grading, which has a strong immediate effect, but also influences further school enrolment, scholarship, or job.

For the students, it is as important as unfair that the teacher should neither be *angry* nor *biased*. Anger was found to be the most frequently expressed teachers' emotion in the classroom (Prosen, Smrtnik Vitulić, & Poljšak-Škraban, 2013). *Bias* negatively affects psychological arrangement, students' identification, motivation and discussions (Berti, Molinari, & Speltini, 2010). In the presented study, *favouritism* was the most frequently mentioned form of bias. In other research it was found that students recognise teachers' favouritism based on students' physical attraction or their parents' connectedness or influence (Aydogan, 2008).

For the teachers, what is as undesirable as being unfair is being *impatient*. Teachers can witness harmful consequences of not providing enough time for students. For example, if teachers prolong the time waiting for students' answers, it facilitates students' higher cognitive processes (Tobin, 1987), so they give longer and better answers and draw more conclusions (Melder, 2011).

The students very strongly believe that a teacher should not be *severe.* The parents and teachers do not rank it among the first five, perhaps because they associate *being severe* with more requirements and expectations from students and thus, better academic achievement. However, an authoritarian teaching style, which practices severity, is not linked with higher order critical thinking (Pisutova-Gerber & Malovicova, 2009).

Arrogance is recognised from all the three perspectives as an undesirable teacher characteristic, although at the bottom of the table. Haughty and self-centred teachers lack sensibility for students, who then feel unnoticed, disregarded and disrespectful for such teachers (Balli, 2014). Arrogance is, according to the students and parents, very close to *insulting*, which is a form of aggression. Similar results were obtained in previous research (Suplicz, 2009; Raufelder et al., 2016). There is abundant evidence that teachers' verbal aggressiveness is related to students'

lower motivation and competence, and higher tension and pressure (Bekiari & Petanidis, 2016).

The teachers mention *intolerance* as the lowest ranked undesirable characteristic, while the parents and students do not list it in the top five. It is very likely that the students and parents already included this characteristic in some of the previously mentioned ones, while the teachers had a more sensitive scale in this regard.

According to Korthagen's model, the teachers listed the most unacceptable characteristics of a good teacher mostly from the level of mission (unfair, impatient, biased and intolerant) and much rarer behaviour (angry) and identity (arrogant). The parents and students identified slightly fewer traits from the level of mission (unfair, impatient and biased) and slightly more from the level of behaviour (angry and insulting). The parents recorded, like the teachers, only one characteristic from the identity level, while the students added one more (severe). The levels of competences, beliefs and environment were not noticed.

Primary and secondary school's perspective

In order to reach the second objective, ranks of unacceptable teacher characteristics were compared depending on primary or secondary school, again from the three perspectives (Table 2). *Unfair* and *angry* teachers are higher ranked in primary schools. Probably being *unfair* or *unjust* covers a wide variety of teachers' undesirable behaviour in primary school, while in secondary schools it splits into more categories. Similarly to previous findings, it is more frequent to hear in primary school that teachers must not be *angry, furious*, that they must not *yell* at students (e.g., Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). It could be that teachers are louder with children in primary schools because they are physically more active.

Bias is ranked higher in secondary schools. Since older students have higher cognitive and emotional capacities, they recognise and articulate better such teacher behaviour than younger students. Also, it is more obvious in secondary schools that teachers' biased approach can affect students' academic achievement and consequently their career and incomes (Mechtenberg, 2009).

The students and parents rank *impatience* higher in secondary school, while the teachers do so in primary school. The students probably expect teachers in secondary school to treat them as equal while the parents expect teachers to prepare students with patience for work or further formal education. In primary schools, teachers very likely see their job as one demanding more patience due to children's more limited cognitive capacities and more brisk behaviour.

While the parents in both schools equally ranked *arrogance*, the secondary school students and teachers considered it as more undesirable, probably associating it with unproductive relations. Adolescents are more sensitive to adults' approach towards them and arrogance is significant in the power dynamics which is relevant for students' performance (Kirk et al., 2016). The same explanation can be given to *insulting* teachers, as secondary schools' students rank it higher. Teachers disapprove of it only in primary schools, maybe witnessing more often the misuse of power.

Only the students and parents in primary and the teachers in secondary schools ranked *severe* among the top five. Younger children associate *sticking to rules* and *having demands* as something unnecessary and bad, while adolescents have more capacity to understand what benefits demands or rules bring in the long run. It is possible that teachers in secondary schools associate being severe with being authoritarian, and see it as harmful (Hargreaves, 2015).

Incompetence is mentioned only by the students and teachers in secondary schools. Older students are more demanding and have higher competence-related expectations from their teachers, and teachers are more aware of the consequences for students' future. Only the teachers mention *intolerance,* and more so in primary schools. They face a wider range of diversity among children, so they consider intolerance as more problematic, while teachers in secondary schools face students that are more selected and homogenous, because they chose a certain type of education.

The teachers in primary schools mention *superficial, unapproachable, permissive,* while the teachers in secondary schools mention *insecure*. It is likely that primary school teachers recognise the danger of a superficial approach as an inability to translate complex concepts to younger children. They probably also find it more relevant to be more approachable because younger students are less autonomous and emotionally more dependent. However, some primary school teachers exaggerate and become too permissive, so their colleagues find it counter-productive (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2009). Teachers in secondary school probably believe that *insecurity* with adolescents can be more harmful than with younger students, leading to poorer classroom management (Morris-Rothschild & Brassard, 2006).

Compared with Korthagen's model, no differences were noticed between the primary and secondary schools. Unacceptable characteristics of a good teacher are identified mostly from the level of mission (unfair, impatient, biased and intolerant). The next is the level of behaviour (angry and insulting) and identity (arrogant and severe), which is slightly more frequently mentioned in the primary school (unapproachable and permissive). At the level of competence, in both schools

incompetence is mentioned, slightly more frequently in the secondary schools. The levels of beliefs and environment were not noticed.

The length of teachers' experience

For the third objective, ranks of unacceptable teacher characteristics were compared in relation to the length of teachers' experience in teaching (Table 3). The teachers at the beginning of their career mention or rank higher *arrogance, being unapproachable, uninteresting* and *bitter.* The novice teachers are trying to cope with everyday novelty, so they seek to make good connections with students and to present themselves as competent and interesting (Huberman, 1989). If they fail, they may become bitter and therefore demotivated.

The teachers with medium experience find *angry, impatient, uninterested* and *superficial* teachers more harmful than other colleagues do. At this stage, they are neither agitated as the beginners, nor tense of saturation (Huberman, 1989). They are more reflective and faced with losing their interest in teaching, which can lead to being precariously superficial.

With longer teaching experience, *unfair, intolerant, being severe* and *permissive* rank higher. The most experienced teachers had enough time to recognise the unfavourable long-term effects of these characteristics. They also mention *incompetent, disorganised, vindictive, inconsistent* and *insecure* as the most unacceptable characteristics. Incompetent, vindictive and insecure teachers very soon produce an unpredictable and disturbing learning environment, while inconsistent and disorganised teachers yield bad consequences in the long run.

In relation to Korthagen's model, unacceptable characteristics of a good teacher, regardless of the length of his/her teaching experience, are identified mostly from the level of *mission* (unfair, impatient, biased and intolerant). The teachers with the longest teaching experience choose characteristics from the *behavioural* level (angry, vindictive, inconsistent and insecure), while for the beginners in teaching the level of *identity* is equally important (arrogant, unapproachable and severe). The beginners mention the levels of *behaviour* (angry, insulting and uninterested) and *belief* (uninterested and bitter) slightly less, while the most experienced teachers mention the level of *identity* (arrogant, severe and permissive) and the level of *competence* (incompetent, disorganised and superficial) more often. The teachers with the medium teaching experience include almost all the levels; after the mission level, they mention the levels of *behaviour* and *identity*, and then the levels of *competence* and *belief*. The level of *environment* was not identified.

Conclusions

Although there is considerable congruence among the three most important stakeholders in the education system related to what a good teacher should not be like, there are some differences in their expectations. The teachers assess their unacceptable characteristics more frequently from the level of mission, seeing their career as one having a wider purpose. The parents and students, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the level of behaviour. They focus more strongly on the obvious demonstration of teachers' misbehaviour than to the deeper meanings and causes.

The limitations of the study include lack of anonymity as a side-effect of interviewing and cultural focus only on one country. However, the findings have relevance for teacher students, so they can explore and reflect on their profession from various levels of Korthagen's model and various stakeholders' perspectives. It is also useful for teachers' continuous professional development to take into consideration and to compare how parents, students and teachers view teachers' negative influence on the life in school. The results confirm that Korthagen's model can be applicable in the analysis of teachers' unacceptable characteristics.

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