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From the Editor:

18 December 2003

*This edition of **Learning Matters** is again contributed by Chris Morgan, Visiting Scholar and Senior Educational Development Adviser with TLC from May to October this year. Before his departure, Chris has kindly prepared a few short papers for **Learning Matters**. Here he continues the theme from the previous edition of **Learning Matters** where he provided some encouraging thoughts on how we all could aspire to teach well. Should you want to make a response to what Chris has said, please send it to TLC.*



The qualities that make a good teacher

There are countless views on what is involved in being good at teaching, this account will be restricted to summarising the points made by one distinguished American university teacher (Beidler, 1997). His views come from personal experience and observation rather than educational theory and he offers 10 suggestions:

1. Good teachers really want to be good teachers

They try very hard and, if they let their students know they are trying hard, their students will respect them for that. If they see that you really want to teach well then they will be prepared to help you with that. However, they will not forgive you if they get the impression that you don't care about your teaching.

2. Good teachers take risks

They set themselves impossible goals then scramble to achieve them. Academic freedom allows university teachers to take chances and try different things in the classroom. It is exciting to try things that may fail; if you succeed then you have accomplished something – and if you don't succeed then you have learnt that you need to make some adjustments.

3. Good teachers have a positive attitude

We ought to enjoy, not complain about, the challenges students give us. Good teachers try not to be cynical or negative about their students or else cast themselves as victims. We need challenges and there is none if all we have are smart, self-motivated, hard-working, wide-awake students; these don't really need to be taught.

4. Good teachers never have enough time

Just about all good teachers are eternally busy, and this is not because of the volume of classes they have to teach. They prefer to be busy and know that the work of good teaching expands to fill every moment they can give it. They are in their office the most hours for students to visit and they get a lot of visits, they put the most effort into providing students with feedback on their assignments, they are most in demand for committee work, they put the most work into their class preparations. They are always trying something different or else refining what they have previously tried.

5. *Good teachers think of teaching as a form of parenting*

Good teachers tend to find that the caring that goes into their teaching feels a lot like the caring that goes into parenting. It means knowing when to stand firm on a deadline or a standard of excellence, and when to bend or apologise. They know that their students, like their own children, have insecurities and problems.

6. *Good teachers try to give their students confidence*

Our students will likely get along fine without knowing much about the subject matter we teach. However it is the process of them learning what we teach that will make a difference for them. The process we take them through such as having them say something worthwhile clearly, forcefully and with a proper marshalling of evidence that will give them confidence in their ability to take on tough assignments. Sometimes we do students a big favour by pushing them to speak up in class. When good teachers do this they will find something positive to say about what is offered.

7. *Good teachers try to keep students – and themselves – off balance*

You are more likely to learn when your comfort, your complacency, and your self-assurance are being threatened. Good teachers detest stagnation and look for fresh challenges for themselves. They also like to have their students take on challenges that they are not at all sure they can handle. They like to move their students beyond their comfort zone to challenge their confidence so they can earn a new confidence.

8. *Good teachers try to motivate students by working within their incentive system*

Most undergraduates seem to be eager to make a lot of money. Lingnan University teachers in the humanities areas may wonder how to use that as an incentive in their teaching. However you can point out to your students that many business executives have majors in the liberal arts. That background has given them the advantage of being able to synthesise things, how to explain things to others, how to persuade others to their point of view, and how to understand the people that make any business work.

9. *Good teachers do not trust student evaluations*

Neither do bad teachers of course, but for different reasons. Good teachers do tend to get very good evaluations, but they focus on the one or two erratic evaluations that say something negative about them. They ask themselves what they did wrong for those one or two students. The not-so-good teachers tend to trust the positive evaluations they receive and dismiss the negative ones.

10. *Good teachers listen to their students*

Those who have asked their students what makes a good teacher have been told that they are accessible, available, approachable, enthusiastic, energetic and excited.

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Reference:

Beidler, PG 1997 'What makes a good teacher?' in JK Roth (ed.) *Inspiring Teaching*, Anker, Bolton MA, pp. 2-12.

This issue and the back issues of 'Learning Matters at Lingnan' can be retrieved from the following URL – <http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/level2/td.htm>.