

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODEL TEACHER IN THE PRESENT SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** *During the educational pathway students meet different types of teachers. Some are quickly forgotten, some are remembered because of their presence and just a small number have a decisive and positive effect on the students' lives. These are the model teachers – the standard every teacher should aspire to. There are teachers who have become models for students because they were admired for what they are and for what they stand. They are the teachers that establish lasting connections. These teachers were not just conveyors of information, but they managed to get to the hearts of their students, gaining their love and respect. The purpose of this study was to highlight the characteristics of the model teacher.*

**Key words:** *personality, teachers, students / pupils, education.*

### Introduction

The teacher is first of all an educator and in order to form and develop the personality of the educated it is not enough to create the context, but they mainly influence through the example of their own personality.

According to Uşinski K. D., the personality of the teacher is very important in the educational process. “There is no status, syllabus, or mechanism of the educational institution – no matter how resourceful or wise it may be – that can replace the personality in the educational field” (1956, p. 47). The purpose of the teacher is “to elevate the soul; not only to teach it, but also to guide it towards a smart living and not towards barren science” (Clement A., 1939, p. 26).

The whole personality of the teacher is involved and engaged in the educational process. “A teacher is valued first of all according to his heart and spirit, according to his influence which radiates from the very person and without which the most perfected methods remain ineffective” (E. Planchard, 1992, p. 227).

The role of the teacher is to inspire, encourage and guide the child in order to become a valued member of the community. P. Ausubel (1981, pp. 532, 533) talks about the roles of the teacher as: “replacement of parents”, “friend”, “confident”, “counsellor”, “advisor”, “representative of the adult society”, “conveyor of society approved values”, “facilitator of personality development”, “leader of educational activities”. According to A. E. Woolfolk quoted by Nicola (1996, pp. 474, 475) the roles of the teacher are: “expert of the teaching-learning process”, “motivating agent”, “leader”, “counsellor”, “model”, “reflexive professional”.

A. Cury (2005) talks about fascinating teachers and makes their description. They are very sensitive and understand the way in which the mind of the student works. They are preoccupied to educate the emotions of the students and they use information as a basis to practice their thinking. They deal effectively with the classroom conflicts and they educate for life. A. Cury makes a distinction between good teachers and fascinating teachers. “Good teachers have an academic culture and convey information in class with confidence and eloquence. (...) Fascinating teachers transform the information into knowledge and knowledge into experience” (2005, p. 54). T. Gordon considers that “the quality of the teacher-student relationship is crucial if teachers want to be effective in teaching anything – any subject, any ‘content’, any ability, any value or faith. (...) Even basketball, drawing, gymnastics or sexual education can be taught in such a way that the students get bored and become opposed to learning – if the teacher creates relations in which the students feel misunderstood, humiliated or wrongly evaluated” (2011, p. 25).

In his book *Didactica Magna* I. A. Comenius compares the human spirit to a seed that contains the germ of human development. This is where the educator and the education intervene. “It is not necessary to introduce in the person something from the outside, but only to discover what is hidden inside, to develop and show clearly the significance of every moment” (1921, p. 80). G. Steiner shows that “the living master holds in his palms the inner being of his apprentices, the fragile and inflammatory matter of their possibilities. He puts his hands on what we consider to be the soul and the roots of the being” (2005, p. 129). Kant thinks that the educator holds a crucial role in the educational process: “That is why the lack of discipline and instruction in some people makes them bad teachers for their students” (1992, pp. 10, 11).

According to E. Planchard, a very important rule of teaching is “to love and to become loved” (1992, p. 44). E. Planchard thinks that “without eagerness and personal values, whose roots can be found in the heart and not in the intelligence, there is a good chance that the most seductive discoveries of teaching will remain without effect” (1992, pp. 226, 227). According to

Piobetta quoted by V. Pavelcu, “it is not enough to work with method, but it is most important that you work with love. Love produces and maintains agility, eagerness, delight, clarity, tenacity, self confidence, which all lead to success” (1968, p. 135). Professor C. Cuceș brings into discussion the same idea of educational love: “Any educational activity is based on educational love, which means openness, generosity, emotional availability and not unhealthy and self-centred projection or a discharge of impulses” (2008, p. 20). V. Pavelcu also makes a distinction between educational and parental love: “The real educational love is different from the parental one, which is usually blind and exclusive; it is combined with requirements, balanced by the sense of justice and mutual respect, illuminated by the conscience of dignity and responsibility, devoid of the personal interest of the educator” (1967, p. 203). In his book *Profesorul de succes (The successful teacher)*, I. O. Pânișoară besides the three educational principles (knowledge, communication, creativity) and the ‘traditional’ principles of teaching (2009, pp. 9, 10) adds 59 more principles of practical teaching which determine reflection themes for teachers and aspiring teachers.

## **Methodology**

Starting from the theoretical aspects of the model teacher found in the specialty literature we have made a study in April 2015 together with students from West University of Timisoara. The study follows the psychopedagogical studies syllabus. The panel was made up by 70 students from almost all majors, with an age group between 18-26 years old. The research was qualitative. The study intends to identify the characteristics of the model teacher. Students were asked to describe in 25-30 rows the teachers they have admired during their school years and who represented a model for them. They were asked to offer arguments for their opinions.

### Objectives:

1. To identify the model teachers from their school years;
2. To analyse the model teachers;
3. To identify the characteristics of the model teachers.

### Hypothesis

If teachers are involved in the educational process then the students will have the same attitude.

## **Results**

Next I will present a selection of results from the interviews. In order to preserve their anonymity, the students that took part in the interviews will not be mentioned by name and the faculty where they study will not be specified.

**1. M. T.**

*“First of all I would like to talk about my mathematics teacher from primary and secondary school because he made me realize how much I like maths and that I had the capacity to cope in my future activity as student at the best maths high-school in the county. Beside the help in understanding mathematical concepts, he also offered me moral support and encouraged me any time I needed it. Another teacher that influenced me was my Romanian teacher in high-school who helped me during my 12<sup>th</sup> grade prepare for the final exam. She motivated me to surpass myself and she was very emotional when she told me that she was very proud of me. This makes me think about her very kindly. She used to talk to us about all the aspects of life and she was a real role model for me in life.”*

**2. P. C.**

*“The first person that comes to mind is my former Romanian teacher and form-master. This woman, besides being an exceptional person, is also the best teacher I have had the honour to meet. I have always admired her passion for everything. We used to hang on her every word because of the passion and interest; she used to utter every word like she has discovered it herself. She had the power to lure us into a fantastic world even while talking about everyday experiences. She was the only teacher that managed to unite us and get the best out of us. Last but not least, the teacher of music instrument was an exceptional persona and an accomplished teacher who managed to draw from me abilities and experiences that I did not know I had. We had a very special relation because we were working not only with our mind, but also with our soul and that makes everything more profound.”*

**3. D. E.**

*“The first teacher that I consider was a model for me was my form-master who was with us from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade until the end of high-school. We had the opportunity to get to know each other very well because she was also our Romanian teacher. I have always appreciated the love she showed for every student without discriminating anyone on any grounds. She was also an excellent teacher with exceptional teaching skills. Anyone could see that she loved her job very much, in spite of the difficulties that came with it. I also remember her dedication when she stood up for us in the face of some unfounded accusations.”*

**4. S. C.**

*“I am a person with humanist inclinations. My parents’ choice was for me to finish a mathematics-physics high-school. They always said that ‘maths was good for everything, and without maths you cannot go the university you*

*want in four years' time'. I was the kind of student who excelled in all subjects. During my high-school years I felt like disconnected from the science subjects. I have studied them all but without passion. My meeting with the physics professor changed my destiny. He became my role model. He managed to present as a fairy-tale all the physics problems with dull text and no practicality. During the four years of high-school he managed to convey that physics is an art and he showed us how the results of physics experiments can be found in everyday life. This is why I chose to attend the physics faculty. Besides his very professional teaching style this man had a very deep sensibility for each of his students. Even if he seemed very severe, he knew every one of us. When you did not know a correct answer he would tell you with a serious face but on a very indulgent tone 'you are wrong'. At the same time my physics professor was also a very good person – he would not discriminate between the students and he was very attentive to those who had difficulties understanding the subject. He will always remain for me a model of human and professional behaviour.*

*Another model teacher that will keep inspiring me in life came up during faculty. I was at my first oral exam and I was very nervous. Before the exam I went up to him and asked him not to look at me while I was speaking during my examination. Very warmly he told me: 'During an oral exam the teacher cannot stand with his back to the student. Just think that I will be there to support you not to question you.' Since then I was never again scared during oral exams. I was somewhat nervous but I was not blocked up. I realize that if that teacher had rushed me I would have been afraid of oral exams all my life."*

### **5. F. A.**

*"During my secondary school I had as a role model my Romanian languages and literature teacher. I appreciated her very much for her dedication she showed at every class. We were a very diverse group – there were students that were very well prepared while others were more playful or disinterested – but when the teacher entered the classroom she made sure that every one would understand the lesson and we would all be going at the same rhythm. This was a very hard thing to do for most of our teachers, but she always made it seem easy. Her success was due to her love for teaching and her dedication. We were all her children, without differences, and we were all praised when we were good or scolded when we were bad. The thing that I learned from her and has become a principle in life for me is this: 'do what you like in life because that is when you are most content'."*

**6. D. R.**

*“When I was in secondary school I had a physics teacher that I liked very much. I never liked physics, but I was learning because I did not want to disappoint her. I liked her because she was always calm and she would explain the lessons in such a way so that we all understood. She knew how to make the subject attractive. Her classes were a pleasure. Another person that I admired back then was the Romanian teacher – she was always in a good mood and lively and she contaminated us with her positive energy. I admired her for her intelligence, for the way she asserted herself and for her correctness. She always tried to use funny examples during teaching so that we could remember the information easily. She gave us advice about our future, other people and our behaviour. When I was in high-school I met two teachers that became very close to me and my colleagues. My form masters were married, and during the first two high-school years he was our form master and for the other two years she was. We loved them both very much and they have taught us a lot. I liked to listen to them teaching, telling us about life and trying to prepare us for the future. They knew how to become close to us and be our friends, but also be strict when the situation asked for it. On Christmas I visited them together with my colleagues. I admired them because they were intelligent and I wished I knew so many things. We learned from each one things that I still remember today and I try to put them into practice.”*

**7. V.I.**

*“The first teacher that impressed me and that I can call a role model was my elementary school teacher. She is also a good teaching model because she was able to relate to every pupil without any discrimination. Also my 5<sup>th</sup> grade Romanian teacher represents a model for me, as a person and as a teacher. I was impressed by the ‘lively’ Romanian classes – for example, it was not very important to learn poems by heart as it was to be able to speak about the frame of mind that poem created for you. My teacher of musical instrument was also a model for me. I think the key to teaching is the way in which a teacher can impose discipline and desire to study – not by using fear of the teacher but by instilling in you the desire to evolve.”*

**8. O. A.**

*“The teachers that have been a model for me are the English and History teachers from high-school. Their teaching style was special. I gladly attended their classes. They could very well combine usefulness with pleasure and managed to capture our attention and keep us active during their classes. Their classes were not dedicated only to teaching the syllabus as is usually the case. We were very close to these teachers, even closer than to*

*our form master. They were the persons that we asked advice from and to whom we told about the things that happened to us. Besides the knowledge in History and English we also got life experience and examples of ‘do this, don’t do that’. They have been more than teachers to us – they have been our friends, our parents and critics.”*

**9. J. K.**

*“The first teacher that I admired was because he stood out in the way he was teaching his discipline. He would combine usefulness with pleasure and managed to structure the syllabus in such a way that it did not seem difficult. He used humour and motivation in order to stir our curiosity and interest. The main ingredient in this job was illustrated by a high-school teacher. Besides the obvious inclination she had for this field she was also preoccupied by us and our human nature. She created a special bond with the pupils and got really involved in this process so that she managed to prepare us for life’s struggles and ensure us a huge motivation through her own example. This is one aspect that I think any real teacher should integrate in his activity.”*

**10. O. V.**

*“Throughout time I was lucky enough to know three special teachers. They have showed me that it is essential to leave school with a nice character. I had the privilege to have a very young teacher – we were her first generation of pupils – and she showed us what gentleness means and how it can join discipline. This teacher was an example of devotion and love for children, just like any teacher should be. In high-school the geography teacher was very much liked because he was the first to stress how important it is to understand what we are studying and how irrelevant is to study something that will not help you in life. He was the only one that gave us a 10 not for how much we managed to memorize from the manual but for the answers we gave to his thinking questions, in which he demonstrated how logical the laws of nature and geography are. The third special teacher was the history teacher in high-school. He was highly intelligent and had a memory like I have never seen before. He was the man who seemed to know everything, who spoke with passion about history, music, inventions and everything else and who, if he didn’t know and answer, would go home and search so that he could give us the information the next day. He was the teacher that made us all study and to whom we owe our good grades at the baccalaureate exam. Such love and respect! He always made us feel special and appreciated in his presence. Every time he entered the classroom he would ask: ‘How are you today, champions?’”*

**11. S. L.**

*“The teacher that I admired most was my violin teacher. She managed to motivate me to study with pleasure. Besides the fact that she helped me evolve by finding different methods that would make my work easier, she also supported me and trusted me. I also saw a friend in her because she knew how to listen to me when I had problems and gave me good advice in how to solve them. My opinion is that a good teacher should know how to communicate with her pupils, should be understanding, should find useful methods to help the pupils study and open new horizons for gaining knowledge.”*

**12. H. A.**

*“My French teacher from high-school was and will remain a role model for me. She has gained the respect of the class through the assertiveness of her presentation, the rigour she used when assigning tasks and the correctness she used in their evaluation. She has not stopped there – she used the subject she was teaching to give us life lessons and to become closer to us. She showed us she really cared about the situation of each pupil and she asked us questions that were meant to open our eyes to the truths in life. My French teacher not only filled me with information, like you fill an empty vessel, but she managed to stir in me a fire and thirst for knowledge. That is why she represents a role model for me.”*

**13. N. S.**

*“The first person to have a positive influence on me, just like many others, was my elementary teacher. Some time after I finished elementary school I realized how much I appreciated my teacher because of her passion for teaching, her understanding and affection she showed us and for the fact that she was most important in our education and formation during our first years in school. She always gave us support and offered us the explanations that we needed, she helped us right our wrongs and she praised us. Another teacher that I admire very much is my form master I had during secondary school. He was always paying attention to our needs and he got involved in solving the problems that appeared in class. Besides the fact that he always conveyed the subject he was teaching in a pleasant and interesting way he also had qualities that gained the admiration of his pupils: calm, creativity, empathy and sense of humour. He had a great influence on me because he encouraged me to surpass myself and to improve my school performance. He has helped me prepare for a national contest in which I received one of the first prizes. This gave me a tremendous satisfaction.”*



#### **14. B. B.**

*“One of the most important teachers that represented a model for me was my sociology teacher in high-school. I admired him because he was a very good man but also for the warmth that he brought in class relations. He was more than a teacher for me, he was a friend. No other teacher besides him had this approach towards the pupils. When he asked questions in class he always assured us that we are allowed to make mistakes. This made us gain confidence and dare to speak our mind. He always brought complementary materials for class besides the regular manual and he was preoccupied to animate the class and make it more interesting. His teaching was done with dedication and passion. There were no classes alike because of his creative teaching methods. He managed to transform this subject in the most interesting one I’ve ever studied!”*

*Another teacher that stirred my admiration was my history teacher. For us, pupils, history was a boring and unattractive subject. There was nothing interesting in learning by heart years and events that took place a long time ago: uprisings, revolutions, kings, rulers etc. We were studying out of ‘obligation’, because we needed a good mark, but there was no pleasure in it. All this changed when this teacher was assigned to our class. He had a totally different approach in teaching history. He made us think and he made us step in the shoes of historical characters and personalities. We would watch various films about historical events, took part in competitions, create projects and posters etc. He managed to grab our attention in seconds. We started to take pleasure in studying history and be curious about it. We were not studying just because we were afraid of bad marks. I have admired my teacher for his speaking talent, his sense of humour and his teaching skills. He would get us involved in debates and encourage us to reflect and identify causes and effects, but also possible solutions. These teachers have been ‘different’, they had ‘different’ teaching skills and made us learn in a ‘different’ way.”*

#### **15. D. P.**

*“My mathematics teacher from secondary school, at first sight very cold and harsh, managed to win us over through his information overload. His authoritative but also joking way always managed to grab my attention. He remains the teacher with the most complex personality, a very direct man, but also understanding and demanding. He was correct, imposing and respected by all pupils. He knew how to make us pay attention, to learn and discover the beautiful part of his subject. I have proved my respect and admiration for this teacher by obtaining very good results in mathematics.”*

**16. U. P.**

*“In time I have met different types of teachers. Some of them were just conveyors of information or came to classes in order to gain the money for their bills. The other part of the teachers I had were the model teachers. They relate to their pupils, are preoccupied with their problems, listen to them, understand them and help them find solutions to their problems. My Romanian teacher from high-school belongs to this latter category. When she first came to class she was smiling and was very energetic. In spite of the bad things she heard about or class she was determined to give us a second chance and she told us: ‘I’m sure we will get along very well’. And that is exactly what happened. She helped us prepare for the baccalaureate by encouraging us to read the books, teaching us how to create descriptions of the characters and make comments, by righting our wrongs but at the same time praising us for the correct things. She has earned our respect and love due to the trust she put in us, her passion for teaching and the humour she used to lighten our minds.”*

**17. A. N.**

*“My Romanian teacher from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade was the embodiment of the qualities every teacher should have. First of all she showed the love for the subject she was teaching. She was never late for class, and she always encouraged us and thought of us as very able pupils. She motivated us and never reprimanded us or called us incapable, like other teachers did. We waited for the Romanian class relaxed but also impatient. She managed to be very close to us. She knew each one of us very well. She just had to look at you and realize when you had a problem; after class she would talk to you and try to help with advice. She had a great relationship with the parents as well and they liked her just as much as the pupils.”*

**18. U. S.**

*“All throughout my academic pathway I only had one teacher that I viewed as a mentor and to whose values I have respected. My English teacher was my mentor and teacher for eight years. She is also a teacher that had a major influence on my school journey. This teacher has laid the foundations of English language for me but has also taught me how to structure my learning process and to develop my creative abilities. Taking into consideration my learning style she has always found new ways to motivate me. Also she has stimulated my love of reading by offering me books that are still among my favourites. She has also kept in touch with my parents and collaborated with them and understood all the activities that I was involved in.”*

### **19. K. D.**

*“I still remember my teacher of social-humanist sciences. Her confidence, calm and professionalism throughout the years have determined me to follow her example. She always offered you the chance to express yourself when you had something to say. She appreciated creativity a lot. Even the noisiest pupils became active in class and got involved in the debates generated by the socio-political events. This was the result of the lesson approach that she used and positive atmosphere in class.”*

In this study most of the students had a single model teacher during their educational period, and the cases with two or three model teachers were very rare. From the research we can draw the conclusion that a model represents a person who is admired, who inspires the student and determines him to surpass himself and reach his own maximum potential. A teacher by definition is a model worthy of following in life. A teacher is an educated, polite person, with select social behaviour, who abounds in empathy and wisdom. All these cultivated or acquired qualities are intended to be passed on to students. In many cases all the above mentioned qualities are closer to fiction. Indifference, the accent put only on passing on information, student labelling etc. replace the imaginary teacher and become reality.

The abilities, personality and professional competences of the teacher determine profound repercussions upon the students and will have an influence throughout their lives. “Education means confrontation. Each person lives it in a different way, as a ‘personal experience’ that still reflects – whether we are conscious or whether the happenings leave a trace on our behaviour in the deepest recesses of our being – a range of meetings, some short, others everlasting, with other beings of the human species who were responsible at some point for our development” (D. Hameline, 1978, pp. 3, 4).

Students in a conscious or involuntary way imitate the behaviour of their teachers because the teachers’ personality is always in front of them, as something “perceptible”. Teachers who are their students’ models are those who get totally involved in the educational process, who convey the information and knowledge in a correct and adequate way to their students. They know how to involve the students in the teaching-learning process by using the most adequate strategy and thus stirring their curiosity. The teaching-learning process is accompanied by emotion and vibration. Good teachers cannot afford to be misunderstood. They make sure that even the least interested student in class learns something. A model teacher understands students and identifies their specific needs according to their development age. They stimulate creativity, imagination and use to the maximum the potential of each student. They form values, attitudes and

behaviours. Model teachers are authentic persons who adapt and do not judge.

In order to practice these characteristics the premise is represented by self-awareness and integration of all personal aspects and experiences. It is very important to highlight the importance of flexibility in teaching, of implication in the relation with the students and of self-disclosure – attitude, noble-mindedness and wisdom.

## **Conclusions**

As observed from above study, to be a good teacher implies a multitude of personal characteristics beyond a perfect professionalism. There is a certain “investment” done by the teachers in their own students and these results may be seen but especially felt in time as an internal state. This investment in each student actually represents the sustained effort of the teacher to understand the student and to adapt the teaching style according to the psychological and developmental parameters of the child.

In order to be a good teacher and to be able to become a role model for your students you need to know when and in what way to act. A teacher must have patience, must be objective and not discriminate, must be open and available for his students, and must know how to teach his own subject in such a way to motivate them and to attract their attention.

Teachers become models because of their passion to teach and their dedication. These are the teachers that are close to their students and who support them, who prompt them to learn instead of reprimanding them for their mistakes, who help them identify their mistakes and correct them. A teacher who is admired by his students is the one who is not only preoccupied to convey some information, but the one who is actively involved in the formation and development of his students.

Besides the academic and psycho-pedagogical competences, computer skills, relational and communication competences, knowledge and self-awareness, reflexive and self-reflexive competences, the teacher must have skills and academic tact. Students need an understanding attitude from their teachers in order to have the courage to express their thoughts, sentiments, fears and aspirations.

In conclusion, it is very important to create a positive emotional climate in the classroom because this gives students a sense in life. The love of the teacher for his own profession and also for his students is the one that triggers the love of the students for the teacher and the subject he is teaching. In time the student will start to love the activity of the teacher and will regard it as a model. It will trigger, stimulate and consolidate the motivation of the students to learn.

In time students will become conscious that their own professional formation and personal development will have to be supported by perseverance and exercise. The confidence of the teacher in the internal resources of the students, the encouragement of the students to value their own internal resources, mutual respect, commitment, enthusiasm, passion and preparedness in the discipline should accompany the whole informative-formative-educational process. People who aspire to this profession as well as those who are already practising it should reflect on the fact that to be a teacher implies a great responsibility, a lot of patience and perseverance because the subject is human beings in full developmental process.

The teachers who have become models for their students have first of all created characters and built People and only then created mathematicians, chemists, engineers etc. It is true that in education the results of the work are not seen in the short term, it is necessary for a long time to pass in order to collect the fruits, but this is exactly what gives a greater satisfaction to this profession.

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