

*What It Means to be a Great Teacher?  
The Life Experience of University Students in Thailand*

Pataraporn Sangkapreecha, Bangkok University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Education & International Development 2022  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Educational research on teacher-student relationships recognizes their impact on students. However, it typically emphasizes on physical outcomes, such as students' learning achievement, with less attention to psychological ones, such as students' feelings. While everyone acknowledges the significance of the professional teacher, little acknowledgment of caring and loving teacher as an issue exists in the meaning of a great teacher. Employing a qualitative-interpretative analysis with university students in Thailand, this research paper presents the student narratives and stories which describe the meaning of a great teacher in practice and argues for recognition of what it means to be a great teacher from the perspective of Thai culture. Furthermore, the student's narratives describe what they relational experience from teaching, caring, loving, and being in a relationship with their teacher and how this meaningful relationship affects and alters their own lives.

Keywords: Great Teacher, Education, University Student, Thailand

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

Teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other resource. In the previous study, research on teacher impacts (Oppen, 2019) has consistently found that a good teacher can make all the difference in student outcomes, even when other resources are lacking or unavailable. Historically, educational theory and research suggest that teachers who are learners make a difference for student learning (Dewey, 1916). This notion dates to early philosophy of education that describes the shared relationship with the construction of knowledge.

This social constructivist view of learning and the teacher's role has not readily been the definitive meaning of effective teaching or the interpretation of teacher as learner. Recent educational reform efforts to identify high quality teachers have led to the measurement of learning characteristics, including degrees, course work, test scores, and years of experience. Much research exists describing the relationships among university degrees, content area course work, professional exam scores, years of experience, and their relationship to student achievement. While these studies are valuable in providing insight into personal teacher characteristics that have a moderate influence on student learning, they provide little in the way of informing areas for development of practice. In sum, studies of the impact of teacher professional learning on student achievement tend to approach teacher professional learning employing a fixed trait approach. Educational research on teacher-student relationships recognizes their impact on students. However, it typically emphasizes on physical outcomes, such as students' learning achievement, with less attention to psychological ones, such as students' feelings. While everyone acknowledges the significance of the professional teacher, little acknowledgment of caring and loving teacher as an issue exists in the meaning of a great teacher.

Previous studies on teacher's image have shown that student's perspectives toward teachers play a critical role in education and function in various ways (Botha, 2009; Jitpranee, 2017). It helps teachers to develop their roles that contribute to the improvement of students' learning skills and any other outcomes (Bas & Bal-Gezegin, 2015; Ishiki, 2011). Bas and Bal-Gezegin (2015) noted that understanding students' perspectives enables teachers to indicate students' attitudes toward learning and learning success. This means that teachers can access the mental images of their students' perceptions and reflections of the effectiveness of being a great teacher for their students.

Employing a qualitative-interpretative analysis with university students in Thailand, this research paper presents the student narratives and stories which describe the meaning of a great teacher in practice and argues for recognition of what it means to be a great teacher from the perspective of Thai culture. Furthermore, the student's narratives describe what they relational experience from teaching, caring, loving, and being in a relationship with their teacher and how this meaningful relationship affects and alters their own lives.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Regulation of the Teachers Council of Thailand on Professional Standards and Ethics***

### *Standards of Professional Knowledge and Experience*

1. Standards of Knowledge with the knowledge in the areas of language and technology for teachers, curriculum development, learning management, psychology for teachers, educational measurement and evaluation, classroom management, educational research, educational innovation and information technology and teachership.
2. Standards of Professional Experience, by passing the criteria of training on professional practice during study and practical training in educational institutions on specific subjects.

### *Standards of Performance*

Those who practice the Profession of Teachers shall perform their duties in accordance with the Standards of Performance as follows:

1. Regularly practice academic activities relating to development of the Profession of Teachers
2. Make decisions to practice various activities taking into account consequences on learners
3. Be committed to developing learners to reach their full potentiality
4. Develop teaching plans for effective implementation
5. Regularly develop instructional media to be effective
6. Organize instructional activities focusing on permanent results for learners
7. Systematically report on results of learners' quality development
8. Conduct themselves as a good role model for learners
9. Constructive cooperate with others in educational institutions
10. Constructively cooperate with others in community
11. Seek and use information for development
12. Create opportunities for learners to learn under all circumstances

For the Professional Ethics, educational professional practitioners shall have love, faith, integrity and responsibility for the profession and act as a good member of professional organizations. For the Client Centered Ethics, educational professional practitioners shall care for and be merciful, pay attention to, assist and encourage their students and clients on an equal treatment basis, in accordance with their roles and duties. Educational professional practitioners also shall encourage their students and clients to achieve learning, skills, good and proper conduct, in accordance with their roles and duties, to the full capability and generosity. Furthermore, the educational professional practitioners shall not act in any manner which in against the physical, intellectual, mental, emotional and social development of their students and clients and shall provide services honestly and equally without asking for, accepting or acquiring any interests which would be considered abuses of their authority (Wisalaporn, 2005).

### *Characteristics of a Great Teacher*

Orlando (2013) proposed the nine characteristics of a great teacher.

1. A great teacher respects students. In a great teacher's classroom, each person's ideas and opinions are valued. Students feel safe to express their feelings and learn to respect and listen to others. This teacher creates a welcoming learning environment for all students.

2. A great teacher creates a sense of community and belonging in the classroom. The mutual respect in this teacher's classroom provides a supportive, collaborative environment. In this small community, there are rules to follow and jobs to be done and each student is aware that he or she is an important, integral part of the group. A great teacher lets students know that they can depend not only on her, but also on the entire class.
3. A great teacher is warm, accessible, enthusiastic and caring. This person is approachable, not only to students, but to everyone on campus. This is the teacher to whom students know they can go with any problems or concerns or even to share a funny story. Great teachers possess good listening skills and take time out of their way-too-busy schedules for anyone who needs them. If this teacher is having a bad day, no one ever knows—the teacher leaves personal baggage outside the school doors.
4. A great teacher sets high expectations for all students. This teacher realizes that the expectations she has for her students greatly affect their achievement; she knows that students generally give to teachers as much or as little as is expected of them.
5. A great teacher has his own love of learning and inspires students with his passion for education and for the course material. He constantly renews himself as a professional on his quest to provide students with the highest quality of education possible. This teacher has no fear of learning new teaching strategies or incorporating new technologies into lessons, and always seems to be the one who is willing to share what he's learned with colleagues.
6. A great teacher is a skilled leader. Different from administrative leaders, effective teachers focus on shared decision-making and teamwork, as well as on community building. This great teacher conveys this sense of leadership to students by providing opportunities for each of them to assume leadership roles.
7. A great teacher can "shift-gears" and is flexible when a lesson isn't working. This teacher assesses his teaching throughout the lessons and finds new ways to present material to make sure that every student understands the key concepts.
8. A great teacher collaborates with colleagues on an ongoing basis. Rather than thinking of herself as weak because she asks for suggestions or help, this teacher views collaboration as a way to learn from a fellow professional. A great teacher uses constructive criticism and advice as an opportunity to grow as an educator.
9. A great teacher maintains professionalism in all areas—from personal appearance to organizational skills and preparedness for each day. Her communication skills are exemplary, whether she is speaking with an administrator, one of her students or a colleague. The respect that the great teacher receives because of her professional manner is obvious to those around her.

Avram (2013) also make a propose of several qualities a great teacher should possess.

1. A balanced personality. A teacher must be able to interact with any student, with extroverts and introverts, with hard working and lazy students, motivated and non - motivated students. He must keep his balance and calmness in any situation, no matter what happens.
2. The sense of justice. In the eyes of a teacher all the students have the same rights. A teacher must not create personal differences between his / her students. A great teacher must have an equidistant attitude in the educational process between himself / herself and the students.

3. General knowledge. Students can always ask any sort of question. Of course, the teacher is not a living encyclopedia and he cannot immediately provide any information for his students. But, ideally speaking, a teacher must know a bit of everything.
4. Devotion. In order to surpass all the bad moments in the classroom, a great teacher must love his / her job and the students. Even if the students are rude or not so motivated, a great teacher knows his / her objectives and what he can do for the students.
5. Good manager. A great teacher may organize easily activities in and outside the school with his students or with other teachers, without being afraid of failure.
6. A strong but not too strong emotional attachment to the students. First of all, a teacher is a normal person, like any other people. He eats, drinks like all the other people and students have to know that a teacher is not a half man-half God creature, but rather a normal person, well educated and trained in his field.

Teachers' and students' relationship experiences in class have profound consequences for their performance and well-being (Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014). It has been proposed that teachers' interpersonal behavior in the interaction with their students is an important antecedent of teacher roles. Donker, et.al (2021) study behavior of 80 teachers from three perspectives (observers, students, and teachers) in terms of Agency (i.e., social influence) and Communion (i.e., friendliness). The three perspectives overlapped more strongly for teacher agency than for communion. Especially for students, teacher communion was a stronger predictor of affections than agency. Teachers' interpersonal behavior in class, thus is important for both teacher and student lives.

## **Methodology**

A core investigation of this research study was “What it means to be a great teacher?” The explanation itself is a challenge, given individual's varied life meanings and experiences, along with its knowledge exposure practices. Given this individuality, this study employed a qualitative-interpretative approach, where the central mode of data gathering was fifty-seven individual online interviews. The questions were designed to allow participants to share their unique meanings and relationship with their teacher and reflect on how their educational-life experiences affects and alters their own lives.

This research had the target participants— natives of Thailand who are either currently students at Bangkok University or alumni. The researcher's Facebook page, thus was selected as a media platform to access these participants. The participants comprised of 31 females, 19 males and 7 LGBT Thai residents ages ranged from 21 to over 50 years. Fifty-three participants identified themselves as undergraduate and graduate students and four participants were called themselves as alumni who already abstained their educational degree from Bangkok University.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness or credibility of the study, the researcher draw on Lofland and Lofland's model (2006) to “test” the reliability and validity of the qualitative results. This is especially important in this study as many scholars understand Thai people as “face saving”, arguing Thai people tend to take others' interest to heart (Redmond, 1998). Applying Lofland and Lofland's criteria, the qualitative data is reliable. First, because the style of reporting is direct, responses are passionate, and diverse. The participants were speaking from first-hand accounts from their personal experiences. This resulted in genuine

responses. Second, internal consistency- the participants' accounts do not contradict themselves.

Open and axial coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) were adopted for data analysis. The open coding technique was used to analyze the data of students' descriptions of the meaning of great teachers at the first stage. It was used to dissect the ideas found in the students' texts into pieces, identify and group them into themes based on their similarities and differences. Later, axial coding technique was used to analyze and put the data found in the first stage into categories according to their relationship, label them, and report them for results.

## Results and Discussion

The meanings used to describe a great teacher can be divided into six themes. The findings for students' descriptions were largely based on their individual perceptions and feeling for their teachers as these descriptions were related to their learning experiences with Thai teachers at school and university, both inside and outside the classroom.

The findings illustrated that there were six meanings used in describing a great teacher. Data in Table 1 shows that the most frequent meaning used to describe a great teacher were the second parent (24.6%), a life coach (22.8%), a big sister/brother (17.5%), a knowledge provider (15.8%), a role model (14.0%) and a justice (5.3%), respectively. They were found to consist of five types of viewpoints. Students' descriptions of a great teacher were analyzed and associated to five types of viewpoints, including emotion, guardian, motivation, academic and power dynamics. Emotion refers to teacher's awareness to students' needs. Guardian refers to the teacher's monitoring and suggestions provided for students. Motivation refers to the teacher's encouragement of their students to accomplish the goals. Academic refers to the teacher's knowledge, ways of teaching, directions and goals. Power dynamics refers to whether a classroom is democratic, inclusive, or participatory.

Table 1. The meanings of a great teacher

No.	Meaning	Description	Example Quotes	N	%
1.	The Second Parent	loves, cares and has all devotion for their children well-being	Teachers who see us as their child in their family  Be like another dad and mom  Teachers who treat us the same as our parents  Teachers who love us like their child  Being more than just a teacher, but like our parent  Take care of us like our dad and mom  (continued)	14	24.6

			Teacher who is everything for students. A person who gives advice, listens, teaches, and no matter how bad things are done, teacher is ready to forgive. like the second mother		
2.	Life Coach	-helps and gives useful knowledge to people -offers choices and gives directions -tells necessary procedures	Teachers attentively listen students and help to solve the problem  Always help to solve any problems, not only learning lessons  Teach us how to live  Listen to our own reasons  Gives us knowledge and experiences. Tell us new things and being supportive  Have a good vision  Teachers who give us life experience even good or bad and pass it on us as a life lesson  Not only not blame us when we do wrong, but offers choices for solutions  Support us to have a better live	13	22.8
3.	Big Sister/Brother	-helps in trouble -sincerely cares and understanding -is friendly, kind, and appreciative	Play attention to student's feeling more than learning performance. Realize on individuals' value and be able to explain difficult things into something easily to understand  Friendly and understanding  Understand us and always helpful  Believe in us  (continued)	10	17.5

			Understand us and get through the problem together		
4.	Knowledge Provider	-has knowledge and gives new information -pay attention in teaching	Teachers teach and give information and knowledge to students  Attentively teach us and have compassionate  Pay attention in teaching such as preparing teaching material well so that students can get as much knowledge as possible and students can ask without being angry to repeat the answer.	9	15.8
5.	Role Model	-looks as a good example who is worthy of imitation -represents an inspirational ideal -inspires others to imitate his or her good behavior	Show us how to do it more than just tell us  Being a good example  Being a model of good person who love and give  Have a good heart, very kind  Give us knowledge and virtue	8	14.0
6.	Justice	-concerns for justice, peace and genuine respect for people -fair treatment	No bias and no discrimination for students who have different classes or appearances  Not choose to love or hate someone	3	5.3

As illustrated in Table 1, Thai students' meaning for a great teacher consisted of six viewpoints as indicated by their different point of views of their teachers based on their individual perceptions, learning experiences, and cultures. One of the interesting meanings related to Thai culture was that a great teacher was like "the second parent". This meaning appeared in the old Thai saying mentioned by a Thai teacher: "my students are my sons/daughters". It reflects Thai students' culturally-unique way of thinking that exhibits their belief for a great teacher by describing them like a parent who always love, help, support and take care of them.

Concerning Thai teachers' instructional practices, students reflected that a great teacher is knowledgeable, competent, well-planned, helpful, and motivated teachers. They could also predict students' learning difficulties and needs and provided effective solutions, strategies,



and feedback on their learning. Furthermore, a great teacher is able to make the class fun, enjoyable, and motivating. It is also indicated that a great teacher should be emphatic and sensitive to students' learning needs and feelings. They always provide advice and offer solutions for students' problems and disappointment. They should be a role model and inspire students to be a better person.

The results of this research study revealed the perspective of a great teacher of Thai university students in accordance with the Professional Ethics and behavior model under the Professional Ethics (Wisalaporn, 2005) with various respects. These include a great teacher care for and be merciful, pay attention to students' needs. A great teacher conducts oneself as a good role model for students and provide services honestly and equally without asking for. The results also in accordance with the characteristics of a great teacher proposed by Orlando (2013) in the characteristics of respecting, caring and inspiring students. In accordance with the qualities of a great teacher proposed by Avram (2013) in the sense of justice and devotion. However, the results of this study provide the greater knowledge that a great teacher needs to draw a very thin border between the personal life and professional life. A great teacher needs to play the role of a big sister/brother in front of their students. At the same time, a great teacher cares for the students not just as a teacher, but also as a second parent. The students expect their students to be their second parent who love, care, and think they are the teacher's family member.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

Being a great teacher is not impossible. Through the results of this study, the creation of a meaningful practical description of what it means to be a great teacher is evident. A great teacher needs to care about the needs of his / her students and listen carefully to their voices. A great teacher lives forever not just in the students' minds, but also in their hearts.

The research study concludes that this way of collecting perspective from Thai students towards the meaning of a great teacher should be considered as a valuable way for getting deeper insights into students' concerns and should be used along with the more common practice of teacher related feedback from students. Moreover, the study identified the major six attributes of a great teacher. The attributes included being the second parent, a life coach, a knowledge provider, a big sister/brother, a role model and a justice. Therefore, this research adds new knowledge for Thai teachers to consider when doing their duty for students at their schools or universities. With this in mind, Thai teachers and administrators should be concerned about and listen empathically to students' needs for better understanding, and then use that understanding to develop more appropriate and likeable classroom activities in order to improve the qualities of life learning and teaching in the Thai student curriculum.

## References

- Avram, I. (2013). The secrets of a great teacher. *Journal of Innovation in Psychology, Education and Didactics*, 17(2), 97-104.
- Baş, M., & Bal-Gezegin, B. (2015). Teachers as patience stones: A metaphor analysis of students' conceptualizations of EFL teachers in Turkey. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 1(3), 1-9.
- Botha, E. (2009). Why metaphor matters in education. *South African Journal of Education*, 29, 431-444.
- Dewey, J (1916). *Democracy and education an introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: MacMillan.
- Donker, M.H., Vemde, L.V., Hessen, D.J., Gog, T.V. and Mainhard, T. (2021) Observational, student, and teacher perspectives on interpersonal teacher behavior: Shared and unique associations with teacher and student emotions. *Learning and Instruction*, 73, 1-14.
- Ishiki, N. (2011). Trajectories of English learning: Through the use and analysis of EFL students' metaphors. *Proceedings-English Studies in Various Contexts: The 3rd International conference on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, 1 – 11.
- Jitpranee, J. (2017). Metaphor analysis: Students' metaphorical conceptualizations of English teachers at a university in Thailand. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 48 – 57.
- Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analysing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Mega, C., Ronconi, L., & De Beni, R. (2014). What makes a good student? How emotions, self-regulated learning, and motivation contribute to academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 106, 121-131.
- Opper, I. (2019). Teachers matter: understanding teachers impacts on student achievement, from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4312.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4312.html), February 15, 2020.
- Orlando, M. (2013). Nine characteristics of a great teacher. Retrieved December 12, 2020, from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/nine-characteristics-of-a-great-teacher/>
- Redmond, M. (1998). *Wondering into Thai culture, or, Thai whys, and otherwise*. Bangkok: Redmondian Insight Enterprises.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Wisalaporn, S. (2005). Regulation of the Teachers Council of Thailand on Professional Standards and Ethics Retrieved December 12, 2020, from <http://teachercodes.iiep.unesco.org/teachercodes/codes/Asia/Thailand.pdf>