

Are You a Bad Teacher?

It is a shocking reality that the vast majority of “teachers” have no idea what it means to be an “[educated](#)” human being. If this is true, and indeed it is demonstrable, then it should not be a surprise to learn that most Americans have no idea what it means to be a good teacher. Ask the question, “Have you had any good teachers?” and people will invariably answer, “Yes, I have had a few.” If we continue the line of questioning and ask, “What made them good teachers?” we will likely get a wide range of answers, but it is unlikely that the various answers will collectively end in painting an accurate portrait of the truly good teacher.

Valerie Strauss, a writer on education at *The Washington Post*, [presents](#) a list of five questions she asserts will help one discern whether or not he is a bad teacher. It is fair to assume that Ms. Strauss considers these five attributes to be the five most important attributes of a good teacher. She asks: 1. Do you like children? 2. Do you find the subject matter dull? 3. Do you know what you are talking about? 4. Do you ignore a large subset of your students? And 5. Are you totally disengaged?

Is it possible that these five considerations comprise the ingredients of a good teacher? Or is Valerie Strauss—even though she considers herself an authority on the subject of education—just one of a vast majority in America who has no idea what makes a good teacher?

Ms. Strauss’ first question seems to be a no brainer. Do you like children? Who does not like children? Who has gone into teaching who does not like children? The question alone reduces a very important consideration to a personal preference. Strauss claims that the bad teachers she knows do not like children. Have you been in a public school classroom lately? There is a huge difference between liking children and

observing the maddening behavior allowed and at times encouraged in the public schools. That the majority of school teachers have been flexible enough to normalize such terrible behavior is what ought to concern us. Any reasonable, normal human person would be shocked by the decline in student behavior, and the better teacher would not stand for it, thus giving the appearance of not liking the children.

The real question should have been, "Do you know who is sitting in those desks in front of you?" The answer is a multitude of little images of God, all of whom are incalculably valuable and intrinsically lovable human beings. They possess a tripartite human soul consisting of appetites, intellect, and will. If we remarry the fact/value distinction, we will easily see that these truths call for specific and intentional considerations if human learning is going to transpire. It ought to appeal to common sense that if a teacher does not recognize the human souls in front of him for who they truly are, then he cannot possibly teach them well because he will not know how humans truly learn.

It really does not matter if a teacher likes his students or not. A doctor is not required to like his patients to be a good doctor, but he must understand the human physiology, the nature of human healing and be wise enough to follow a course of action that will lead to the best possible healthy end. A lawyer does not need to like his clients to be a good lawyer; he must understand the nature of law and justice and be able to articulate effectively the best course of legal action for his client.

The notion that a teacher must like his students is as upside-down as nearly every aspect of modern education. The false assumption that a teacher must "like" his students implies an instrumentality that will lead to good teaching. It will not because liking someone ought not to be viewed as instrumental. It is possible for the good teacher to like his students as a fruit from an orchard that both teacher and student helped to

cultivate. It does not make any sense to suggest that a teacher is obligated to like a classroom full of irreverent and entitled students who care nothing for the teacher and what he is trying to do. To like a student implies a properly ordered relationship between teacher and student, not a strategy to become a good teacher. The modern public classroom is anything but a properly-ordered learning environment. The good teacher will be liked and like his students partly because it is not a consideration, but an artifact of good teaching.

Ms. Strauss then suggests that if one finds the subject matter dull, then perhaps they are a bad teacher. There is no good teacher who would not be horrified by the anti-human and anti-intellectual subject matter being ideologically propagated in the public schools. What passes for curriculum in standards-based learning epitomizes and inculcates boredom. Ms. Strauss would advance the myth that teachers are like salesmen and that if they are enthusiastic about what they are teaching, the children will learn. The real question about the subject matter does not revolve around the enthusiasm of the teacher, but whether or not it is good, true, and beautiful. In the public schools it is not, so if a teacher is enthusiastic about the terrible subject matter of the modern school, that would not be the sign of a good teacher but an ignorant one. Enthusiasm is a fruit of the good teacher, not the root.

Ms. Strauss' third concern is that teachers know what they are talking about, an attribute devoutly to be wished. To be truly knowledgeable is one of the keys to being a good teacher, but if the subject matter in the public schools itself is not authoritative in any sense, which it is not, then what would a teacher who "knows what they are talking about" look like? A knowledgeable teacher would rail against the current pedagogies, methodologies, and content of the modern school. If the good teacher really knows what he is talking about, then in the public schools he would likely be fired.

Ms. Strauss goes on to suggest that a teacher who ignores a large subset of his students most of the time would be a bad teacher. I would suggest that after the good teacher brings a proper curriculum to his students, then they must make the effort to not be ignorable. If you spend time in a public classroom you will learn that students are now very adept at becoming ignorable through creative tactics that make them appear engaged while actually being disengaged. Instead of coming up with endless tricks to engage all students, such as dog clickers and flashy gimmicks, the good teacher would better serve his students if he discovers why students are so disengaged in the public schools in the first place.

John Henry Newman explains in [*The Idea of the University*](#) that students are to expend a great deal of effort to relate all the facts they learn into a “unified and organic whole and to assimilate them as the body assimilates food.” Newman suggests that by mental eyes and hooks a student must sew learned facts together into a seamless garment of integrated knowledge. This would be impossible today because modern learning is like trying to deposit a bucket of disparate facts that bear no real relationship to one another into unwilling receptacles, so authentic learning does not take place. It may be more appropriate than Ms. Strauss understands for teacher and student alike to ignore one another.

Finally, Ms. Strauss suggest[s] that if a teacher is totally disengaged he is a bad teacher. I suppose that anyone disengaged and burned-out is going to do a poor job. If you ever do meet a good teacher you may learn from him that authentic teaching and learning is not a thing that leads to burn out. Modern public-school teaching is a thing that leads to burn-out for teacher and student alike. I know of third graders who have had it with the public schools, and I know countless teachers who are shock-worn and burned-out. Visit a public school and you will likely witness multitudes of burned out students and teachers, a state of affairs that

requires attention.

Ms. Strauss' five questions are nearly useless in discerning whether or not one is a bad teacher, but she asks a good question by asking, "Are you a bad teacher?" This may draw us to the even better question: "What is a good teacher?" Who knows the answer to this vitally important question? So materialistic are our times, one is likely to believe a good teacher is one who demonstrates the ability to convey and test vast amounts of information. This would demonstrate a reduction of education to transitive considerations, cut off from the good, the true, and the beautiful. The good teacher understands that teaching is an art of intransitive considerations requiring subject material to be good, true, and beautiful.

Millions of Americans turn their children over to the public schools because we have been assured that they will return them to us educated. How is this supposed to happen when it seems no one in the public schools knows what an education is, much less what it takes to be a good teacher? Are there good teachers in the public schools? It does not much matter when programmatically, the public school agenda is far removed from any real considerations of an authentic education. Ask around to find out if anyone knows what makes a good teacher. Ask at the public schools and perhaps the superintendent's office. The answers may surprise you because it seems that no one really knows anymore. Are you a good teacher?

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