

THE FASCINATING PROFESSOR. A POINT OF VIEW*

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Abstract

One of the main objectives of the teaching is to reach those psycho-emotional springs of those who participate in the teaching act able to turn the participants into captives of the discourse, ideas, and relationship that is built in the created teaching context.

Fascination is the way, and the professor is in the hypothesis to realize this act.

This article presents the results of a study on the qualities that a professor should possess to be fascinating, as it was identified and described following the exploratory approach focused on questionnaire-based research applied to a number of 130 students in the first year from different faculties of the University of Craiova.

The final results, obtained through the expert consultation technique, corroborated with the Critical Incident Technique and the Assessment Scale with Behavioral Anchors, were organized in the form of a hierarchical list of qualities of the fascinating professor, a list that allowed to draw current conclusions regarding directions likely to develop professor teaching approaches.

Key words: *Fascination teaching; Fascinating professor; Professor teaching.*

1. Introduction

Our research journey started with a legitimate question, based on an extremely current reality, formulated by professor Mariana Anghel: “why after so many years of school and university teaching, do some professors sometimes become “invisible” to students? Why is the professor's voice almost unheard by the students and only in the classroom?” (Anghel, 2021).

The answer found by the author is a sensitive one, open to reflection: “We seem invisible because we, the professors, overwhelmed by so many worries, forget to show our students our human side. We do not educate emotion and we do not teach students to think of solutions or to be enterprising and visionary (...) I communicate expressively. The student, in turn, communicates (...) In the act of teaching, the student reads me, scans me, and validates me through a natural

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knowledge that they have, like a defense system. We gain true authority and respect through dialogue, professional competence, empathy, flexibility, and a willingness to be creative. Last but not least, if our students do not admire us, we will not have any influence on them” (Anghel, 2021).

On the other hand, “the visible professor must be patiently endowed and to cause learning to be intentional, social, emotional, representative, to happen about others, to trigger emotional connections (...). The visible professor is the one who leaves traces in the minds, in the souls of the student they work with. Their image is imprinted on the eye of the one who felt love, passion, and help and they survive their whole life, beyond borders, beyond years, beyond times” (Bulug, 2021).

Every professor wants to reach the students’ souls, catch them in the images created by their speech, and introduce them to the world of explanations and secrets of the discipline they teach.

This phenomenon of *immersion*² in knowledge, which in the case of teaching makes the individual immerse himself in the action of the film created with his mind's eye when receiving the message, is the gateway to the fascination for the field/discipline taught by the professor.

We all believe that we know the meaning of the verb to fascinate, but for each of us, it takes on particular nuances, in harmony with the individual baggage of experiences.

In our attempt to bring a union in the diversity of meanings, even from the explanation offered by the popular website dexonline and according to it, to fascinate means “1. To attract someone irresistibly to the eye. 2. To make a special impression on someone through outstanding (attractive) traits. 3. To make him be amazed and admired; to captivate; to enchant” (Dexonline, 2009).

Fascination is an incredible ability, it comes from the Latin “fascinatio”, and in the past it had a mystical connotation, to charm, to captivate, so that the other person could not resist (Vlăduțescu, 2013).

The desire to fascinate is based on the instinct to survive and arises from the innate need to influence the behavior of others.

Many times, to survive, we need to be fascinated. Flowers must be fascinating to insects, books must fascinate readers, and companies must fascinate their employees. Whether we realize it or not, we already use this ability to a greater or lesser extent and in certain contexts (Vlăduțescu, 2013). Fascination is closely linked to sympathy, empathy, and optimism. You can't be a fascinating person if you can't be nice. Sympathy means that you simply feel what the other person is feeling, while empathy is about understanding what that person is feeling. "For psychology, sympathy is a mechanism of influence that is based on the affective component that mobilizes people's attitudes. In this sense, sympathy creates a pleasant environment, which facilitates the persuasion of individuals about a specific purpose or cause”

² The phenomenon of immersion is explained to us by Demetrovics Z. and is easily observable in those who play computer games, when they are so immersed in the action of the game that they disconnect from the environment around them, being perceived by others as physically present but psychologically absent (Demetrovics, 2012).

(<https://ro.encyclopedia-titanica.com/significado-de-simpat>). And besides, how could anyone be fascinated if they are not optimistic?

Last but not least, we dare to say, without the idea of being wrong, that the professor is a special kind of craftsman of the dramatic genre. They can be a director, screenwriter, or actor who plays themselves by interacting with all the participants in the act that takes place on the class stage. And for each of these roles, the professor will seek an Oscar.

Are these the same qualities that a professor must have to be fascinating? Our study aims to find the answer to this question, the exploratory approach aims to identify and validate a list of attributes associated with the fascinating professor.

2. About teaching fascination

The subject came to our attention during the first meeting we had with Professor Gabriel Săndoiu³, according to which “only one method has an effect in education: teaching by fascination” (Săndoiu, 2017).

Starting from the depth of the message, we sought to outline an image as accurately as possible of the characteristics that differentiate fascinating professors from the others, as they are captured in literature and specialized studies. In this sense, we can say that there is not an abundance of scientific studies on this subject, most of the identified approaches being characterized by a strong essayistic and philosophical component.

Professor Gabriel Săndoiu also gives us the first characteristic landmarks of fascinating professors, he thought that they can only be those who are in love with the subject they teach, on the one hand, and with the students that they teach, on the other hand (Săndoiu, 2017).

Augusto Cury, in turn, identifies a series of defining behaviors of fascinating professors, drawing a parallel considered good between them and professors. He distinguishes such traits as excellent knowledge of how the human mind works, sensitivity, emotional intelligence, use of memory as support for thinking, charisma, excellent managers of class conflicts, and mentors (Cury, 2005).

Interesting for our investigative approach is the opinion of Ioan Iacob⁴, who states in connection with the fascinating professors that they are the ones who help you develop your critical thinking, who provoke students to think, who form characters, who transmit dedication to the subject they teach, who teaches with passion and involvement, who live what they teach (Iacob, 2018).

Andreea-Gabriela Filimon brings sensitivity to the forefront of the characteristics of fascinating professors. In his opinion, the fascinating professor is the one who speaks with his eyes, the one who guides students on the path of

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⁴ founder and CEO of software company Qualitance, which works with several US start-ups.

knowledge, who nourishes and builds their personality, concluding: "fascinating professors know that inspiration has its origin in the imagination" (Filimon, 2020).

We end our journey with the point of view expressed by Luminița Aldea, who presents the fascinating professor as the professor who believes in their students, who encourages their dreams, but who patiently guides the steps towards their fulfillment, severely and objectively correcting mistakes (Aldea, 2021).

3. Methodology and results

A synthesis of all these points of view could be edifying in terms of the characteristic features of a fascinating professor.

However, we still aim to validate and prioritize the traits of the fascinating professor, as they are seen by high school graduates who have had the rare experience of meeting a professor they found fascinating.

In this regard, the research was based on an investigative approach based on the Critical Incident Technique of J. C. Flanagan (Flanagan, 1954), in conjunction with P.C.'s Behavioral Anchor Rating Scale. Smith and L. M. Kendall (Smith & Kendall, 1963). It aims at obtaining an inventory of the defining features/characteristics of the fascinating professor, organized and ranked from the perspective of the importance perceived by students.

Two categories of subjects took part in the research, on the one hand, a group of volunteers (G 1) made up of 130 (52 boys and 78 girls) first-year students from different faculties within the University of Craiova, and a group of experts (G 2) consisting of 32 professors, graduates of a master's degree.

In the concretization of our exploratory approach we resorted to the use of the evaluation scale with behavioral anchors (SEAC), (Pitariu, 2000) associated with the notion of a fascinating professor, being followed the following stages:

Stage I: the 130 students were reunited and asked to formulate individually (in writing) a list containing the main characteristics, traits, and elements of conduct specific to the fascinating professor. The chosen dimensions were collated, the redundant ones were eliminated, and the resulting list was submitted again to a debate in which it was asked to elaborate explanatory definitions for each dimension (the duration of this action was about 30-60 minutes).

The list could contain a maximum of 15 items, those that resulted in our study being presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inventory of the attributes of the fascinating professor (Stage I)

Sensibility	The professor has no hesitation in showing the human and sensitive side of his personality, being receptive to everything related to the lives of his students.
Motivation	The professor brings emotion to the teaching activity, while also showing emotional intelligence in the relationship with his students
Oratory	The professor masters and applies all the principles and rules of public speaking and discourse

Pasion	The professor shows passion in everything they do (passion for the discipline they teach, for the teaching activity, and passion in their personal and professional life)
Dedication	The professor demonstrates the ability to sacrifice their free time to improve and contribute further to teaching their students
Implication	The professor shows an attitude of involvement with their whole being at every teaching hour
Erudition	The professor knows in detail and completes the specific notions of the discipline he teaches, and they constantly prove a very good general culture.
Enthusiasm	The professor shows enthusiasm in the teaching activity in the classroom and relation to each topic addressed in the lessons taught
Love for children	The love they have for the children is reflected in every behavior of the professor during the teaching, both in the moments when they show their delight in the progress of their students and the moments of dissatisfaction.
Empathy	Aware of the peculiarities of the development of the personality of the students specific to each stage of age, the professor can understand their students, and easily puts themselves in the situations they live in.
Multidisciplinarity	The professor permanently proves their mastery of some notions within related disciplines, being able of inter-and trans-disciplinary explanations that will facilitate the holistic understanding of the notions taught.
Flexibility	The professor is constantly prepared to change and adapt their speech or teaching methods, depending on the particular evolutions in the class; they are not rigid in assessment and evaluation
Creativity	The professor can find a way to reach the soul and mind of each student, developing where appropriate the ways of training focused on each student.
Active listening	In the communication relationship with their students, the professor listens to them to understand, not to offer the answer, asking additional questions necessary to clarify the unclear aspects.

Stage II: The list of dimensions, together with their definitions, was distributed to the group of 32 experts, with the mention to think and give one or two examples describing a higher, medium, and lower professional performance behavior regarding each dimension. After collecting the examples, they were synthesized on a single list, removing the repetitive and trivial ones.

Stage III: The next day, the group of experts was reunited and given a list of the associated dimensions and definitions and another list of examples from the previous action, arranged randomly. The task this time was to associate each example with the size for which it was written. The operation is called "retroversion" and aims to see if the examples correspond qualitatively. As a result of this approach, the examples that could not be assigned to the category for which they were designed constitute ambiguous anchors, and as a result will not be able to be used, being eliminated.

Only those items (examples) with a reallocation rate greater than 69% were retained. Also, a dimension has been removed if it has not been allocated at least 60% of the items initially allocated.

Stage IV: This list of associated definitions was distributed, and the group of student volunteers was asked to sort out the traits of the fascinating professor resulting from Stage I, using a 7-step Likert scale associated with each trait, depending on the degree to which appreciates that each of the resulting features characterizes a fascinating professor.

For each item the average and the standard deviation were then calculated, being selected for the final list those items that possessed the following qualities: they had an average value that covered almost entirely the extent of the scale, they possessed a standard deviation as small as possible.

The first 10 dimensions, in order of importance assigned by the group of volunteers who participated in the study, were retained and organized in the form of an inventory of attributes that characterize a fascinating professor, intended mainly for those who train future professors who are concerned with performing, perfecting, but which can be considered as wishes to fascinate and thus becoming immortal.

The centralized results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Inventory of the attributes of the fascinating professor (Stage IV)

Characteristic features of fascinating professor	Opinion (%)	Percent	Rank
<i>Pasion</i>	62		1
<i>Erudition</i>	55		2
<i>Oratory</i>	53		3
<i>Love for children</i>	45		4
<i>Enthusiasm</i>	40		5
<i>Implication</i>	34		6
<i>Motivation</i>	21		7
<i>Empathy</i>	12		8
<i>Creativity</i>	10		9
<i>Flexibility</i>	8		10

4. Conclusions

The perception of how it is and what traits characterize a fascinating professor presents a load of subjectivism, being frequently a reflection, in the person of the professor, of our own emotions and feelings that we have about the school and sometimes the authority.

Often related to the positive or negative experiences we have had in the school and family environment during our life as students "with homework", opinions about what fascinates us about a professor are deeply personal.

Our investigative approach aims, as it was designed and carried out, to eliminate, as far as possible, this subjectivism or, rather, to reunite all the subjectivisms of the study from the participants in a common subjectivism, as valid as possible for any of us.

From the analysis of the final research, as it is presented in Table 2, we cannot fail to notice that the main dimension involved in the fascination of professors is passion. This conclusion confirms, once again, that sometimes what we must be passionate about, is reaching the souls of others and to be able to convince them.

Although not explicitly mentioned, the presence of optimism in the behavior of professors in the classroom, along with enthusiasm and energy, are the essential ingredients for building an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of fascination.

In many didactic situations, generally at the beginning of the pedagogical relationship with the class and later only accidentally, the effect of fascinating the students can be obtained. However, this fascination does not persist over time unless it is subsequently (re) confirmed by the teaching in the field taught, the higher level of general culture, as well as by the professor's skills in organizing and publicly presenting ideas.

How a professor cannot fascinate the students when they enthusiastically tell the stories of the lives of some authors to explain the context of a particular work, or who makes connections between concepts belonging to different (but complementary) fields to facilitate the understanding of phenomena, in their inner determination, as they otherwise take place in the universe?

Love for children, along with passion, are the main determining factors that contribute to building a favorable climate for the emergence of fascination.

It is not a coincidence that we support this view. From the list of dimensions characteristic of the fascinating professor, these are the only ones related to the history of the professor's personality, their hereditary component, and the component of early critical experiences related to children and the field (discipline taught). For this reason, once they become a professor, they are difficult to be influenced, managed, or change. Instead, all the other things can be acquired through teaching, study, and practice. And all of these, with the right dose to be acquired, make the good professor relatively easy to notice, of course in different weights, by their students.

We appreciate that this can be an opportunity to design dedicated teaching programs for future professors, focused on developing those attitudes and behaviors specific to each of these dimensions.

While not intended to be an exhaustive approach, this study is rather a starting point for any possible future attempt to understand, in more depth, what is changing in the collective perception over time about behaviors and the ways of being a professor can connect with their students, and at the same time, detached from reality, immersing in the universe of teaching.

The change we want around us starts is in our inner and action change, through desire and passion, through the love of souls, and through the thirst to be fascinated every day. Passion is therefore the beginning of fascination and even if it is not for any professor, we can make it so for any student.

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