

# Good Teaching Is Timeless

BY JERROLD FRANK

Over the past 50 years the how and why of what we teach has been the focus of much thought, research, and deliberation. From Grammar-Translation to the Communicative Approach and beyond, the best methodology for English language teaching (ELT) has supposedly been discovered many times. Yet through it all, or perhaps despite it all, teachers have continued to teach and students have continued to learn. While many changes have occurred in ELT over the past five decades, good teaching is timeless. Whether using a SMART Board or a chalkboard, an effective teacher must be able to help each student connect to the material and the subject.

The three articles reprinted here illustrate the timelessness of good teaching. In the first selection, “The Conversation Class,” Acy L. Jackson (1969) incorporates many of the traits of good teaching discussed in the literature of that era into a lesson fresh enough to plug into any modern classroom. While the colored slides he refers to in his extension activities could be implemented in new ways today, Jackson describes how to create an atmosphere conducive to learning that is still relevant. His techniques, lesson plan, and extension activities offer opportunities for students to make powerful connections with the target language.

In the second selection, Alan C. McLean’s 1980 article “Destroying the Teacher: The Need for Learner-Centered Teaching” reminds us that good teaching from the time of Plato until today has actively involved students in the process by helping them to become initiators in their own learning. McLean’s article reminds us that effective teachers understand that it is not their job to listen to their own voices but rather to guide and nurture students into hearing theirs. McLean demonstrates the importance of understanding students individually and shows how teachers can provide them with opportunities to make meaningful connections in their own learning.

Finally, Patricia Miller (1987), a long-time teacher, puts herself on the other side of the desk to identify through the eyes of a student what she feels to be ten characteristics of a good teacher. Her list reminds us of some of the central qualities of timeless teaching. While this article and the others were all written in the previous century, each in its own way reflects what good teachers have been doing throughout time and will continue to do as long as there are teachers.

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