

ARTICLE REVIEW

TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEACHER

(Author- Patricia Miller)

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By San Shwe Baw*

Entitled *Ten Characteristics of a Good Teacher*, Patricia Miller discusses characteristics of a good teacher in her article in English Teaching Forum 2012, Volume 50, Number 1 - the first of the 50th anniversary series. Though the article is written by a well-experienced language teacher, it is written solely from her perspectives as a learner of English.

Obviously, the purpose of the author in writing this article is to share among fellow teachers some personal beliefs she holds regarding what makes a good teacher. It may well be that she is probably aware of the different yardsticks used by both teachers and students throughout the globe in their interpretations of an ideal teacher, which prompts her to venture her own ideas of a good teacher.

The majority of the readers of her article will, of course, be the English language teachers, both native and non-native, teaching worldwide. They will definitely compare the characteristics that the writer mentions with those of their own to the benefits of the students they teach. It can be

said that this article appears in a journal most appropriate for her purpose, as English Teaching Forum is a quarterly journal published by the U.S. Department of State for professionals teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language, with over 85,000 copies of the magazine distributed in more than 130 countries, boasting a worldwide readership of over 200,000.

Since the article contains no detailed research results, and statistical analyses, and is mainly written based on logical and personal reasoning of the writer, it can be considered a conceptual article. However, the research of this nature may be hard to be empirical even if conducted by using experiments, surveys, questionnaires, field studies, etc, because students' interpretations and opinions of a good teacher will always differ from region to region, from culture to culture and from one individual to another, thus making it difficult to come to a universal conclusion.

In describing the qualities of a good teacher, the author has separated them into four areas; namely, (1) affective character-

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istics, (2) skills, (3) classroom management techniques, and (4) academic knowledge. Regarding affective characteristics, she wants a teacher who has a contagious enthusiasm for his teaching, is always encouraging and patient, and never willing to give up on her. Additionally described in this category are characteristics such as being humorous, attentive and unbiased towards students, and having good mental health capable of leaving his emotional baggage outside the classroom. Regarding skills, she wants a teacher who can think up techniques that will allow the student to utilize the skills he has already developed in his first language. In other words, she wants a teacher who is creative. She also likes a teacher who challenges her, meaning there is no reason why a teacher should use any language in the classroom other than the target language. Regarding classroom management, she wants a teacher who will treat her as a person, on an equal basis with all the members of the class, regardless of sex, marital status, race, or her future need for the language. In other words, she demands fairness in classroom. Another factor she prefers under classroom management is pace: she wants a teacher who can spare some time to answer a question after class, or to correct something that she has done on her own. Regarding academic knowledge, the only quality she expects a language teacher to possess is a sound knowledge of grammar: she wants a teacher who knows grammar well and who can explain something on the spot if necessary.

Despite its seemingly simple topic, this article makes some useful contributions for all the teachers in general, and English language teachers in particular. Some of the

points she has raised in her article can even be compared in parallel with some of the preferred characteristics in an English teacher by Assumption University students.

In my 19-year's experience of teaching English to Assumption University students, I have seen many teachers who can successfully alleviate the students' nervousness by reducing their affective filter through a rapport created by humors. The teachers who exactly go by the book at Assumption University are often regarded by the students as 'strict' and are never popular among them. On the other hand, they like teachers who use a myriad of techniques involving information-gap exercises, games, songs, jazz chants, problem solving, etc. 'A merry heart goes all the way' is what should be quoted here.

Most students in our language classes hesitate to ask questions or to ask the teacher for help in front of other students in class, so they choose the time to do so when the teacher is preparing to leave class after the teaching is over. If we show that we appreciate their efforts, they like us better. This is the same characteristics that the writer mentions when she says she wants a teacher who will take a minute or two to answer a question after class.

Very often, the students at Assumption University wonder why their grammar questions can be answered more convincingly by a non-native teacher than a native teacher. The truth is that most of the non-native teachers of English have learnt English grammar in an analytical manner. This is the main reason why grammar is taught at Assumption University by non-native teachers, most of whom used to have English backgrounds similar to those of their

students'. Putting the issue of whether the students like native teachers better than non-native teachers aside, it can be safely assumed that they rely more on the latter than the former when it comes to solving their grammar problems.

As mentioned somewhere above, the students' preferences with regard to the teacher's qualities may not be the same elsewhere. For example, whereas the writer hates switching codes in a language class (i.e. from target language to the native language), quite a number of students at Assumption University may like it better as it will facilitate getting the meaning across in a short time. There is no denying the fact that they like it better if a Thai teacher switches to Thai in a class without any foreign students in explaining a hard concept possibly for purposes of expediency.

To conclude, whichever characteristics of a teacher a student favours over the others is only a matter of personal opinion. However, knowing as many preferred characteristics as possible, despite occasional differences in outlook, is nothing but an asset, especially for a language teacher working at Assumption University, where the teachers and the students from the four corners of the earth meet.