

Journal Critique 1:
The Conversation Class
Carol A. Freeman
Nyack College

Abstract

This article initially drew my attention because of the title, “The Conversation Class,” and year of publication, 2012. I thought this article would offer cutting-edge and current information.

After reading the article and seeing that it was originally published in 1969 (more than 40 years ago!), my interest was really peaked as to why *English Teaching Forum* would choose to reprint the article. Therefore, I read this article with both attention to its content and the fact that it was a reprint from more than forty years ago.

Summary of Article Content

The content of “The Conversation Class” focuses on encouraging ESL teachers to use conversation as a part of their lessons; gives advice on how to create a comfortable learning environment; gives several practical suggestions on how to craft a “conversation” portion of a lesson; and even gives a list of conversation topics. The author of the article based his conclusions on his experience in teaching English to Persian adult students in Iran.

Critique

After having studied the history of methods as presented in our course materials, I felt as if I was walking alongside Jackson as he thought through the importance of including target language in natural conversation in the classroom, an idea that was quite new in 1969. His proposal was birthed in the era when TESOL was moving away from methods such as the Grammar Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method and Cognitive Code Learning. The article reads like a beginner’s manual for those who have never used conversational activities as a part of their class. Jackson’s opening paragraph presents conversation as an *option* for achieving language proficiency, as opposed to a necessary tool for full language understanding and fluency as we view it today. Another telling aspect that hints that the article was written several decades ago is that Jackson used conversation as a stand-alone session, or extra-curricular activity, and not as a critical component that is woven into the whole curriculum. The article is further dated in that he encouraged teachers to learn their student’s names! Nowadays we consider that a very basic element for setting positive teacher/student rapport and a more student-centered teaching approach!

Why would *English Teachers Forum* reprint the article? Perhaps in our present era when there are more and more opportunities to teach English throughout the world and in situations that do not require a professionally trained teacher, Jackson's information is still relevant to those who are minimally trained, especially when presented in a form that is easy for a novice to understand. Perhaps teachers in public school settings aiming to meet required national, state and local standards have their attention shifted from the real reason to teach language--for the students to be able to use it in everyday settings--and this article serves as a reminder of that. For me, the article expanded my view on conversation topics that could be covered, gave examples of interesting activities that would prompt learners to use target language, and even suggested a book covering games that could be used for second language learning which I was still able to order online. "The Conversation Class" is an article that shows that a good teaching idea is relevant and helpful to teachers no matter what the era, and I would recommend it as good reading for all ELL teachers.

References

Jackson, A. L. (2012). The conversation class. *English Teaching Forum*, 50(1), 29-31.
Retrieved from
http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum/archives/docs/forum-12-50-01/50_1_9_pp29-31_reflections_conversation.pdf