

# The Good Teacher, the Metaphorical Tickle Trunk, and the Survival of the Fitter

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## Humanising Language Teaching

# The Good Teacher, the Metaphorical Tickle Trunk, and the Survival of the Fitter

- Terence McLean, Canada

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### Abstract

Being a good teacher is not getting any easier despite advancements in educational technology. As learning curves steepen and students' needs widen, educators today are facing even more pressure. Pinpointing what good teaching or a good teacher is, however, poses a bit of a conundrum. Ask different people and you will get different answers, especially at many educational institutions these days. Nevertheless, we need to look for and learn from good teachers. Of course, well-constructed syllabi, solid subject material, and interesting activities can support good teaching, but what about the teacher? There's the rub. Without the good teacher, the best laid plans can go awry. Good teaching requires a little more; and this, along with the other technical side of instruction, is what educators need to develop. Indeed, survival in any profession requires effort, and good teachers are aware of this. However, we should all strive to be fitter—not necessarily the fittest. There is room for many. This article offers the author's opinions as well as a look at literature on post-secondary educators and students' perceptions of good teaching.

### Introduction

Referring to the style and vocabulary employed by the inimitable P.G. Wodehouse, Christopher Hitchens (2010) once declared: "I learned that to be amusing was not to be frivolous and that language—always the language—was the magic key..." (p. 56). As an English as an additional language (EAL) teacher, I love this quotation; however, I also fancy the following somewhat frivolous one:

*Well, let's see what's in the Tickle Trunk today... (Mr. Dressup)*

If you are unaware of this alliterative Canadian expression, please allow me to explain. Long before cell phones and tablets, we used to make our own fun, and one champion of imaginative play was CBC television show host, Mr. Dressup, a kindhearted soul who kept costumes, for playing make-believe, in his Tickle Trunk. Since then, Tickle Trunk has become a nifty nickname for any box of goodies, especially teaching activities, and occasionally the odd language teacher, this one included, in Canada has fretfully murmured said expression five minutes before a class for which preparation had been lacking, forgotten, or inadvertently avoided. Is the tempting Tickle Trunk the preferred go-to cache of daily academic teaching material? Certainly not. Is such a treasure trove good to have for warm up, emergency, and ice breaker activities? Absolutely, if not physically, then at least metaphorically in one's head. After all, good teaching needs all the help it can get. In fact, I believe that over time, some enlightened teachers who shine with ideas, plans, and energy can become the Tickle Trunk personified. I am not there yet, but one can dream. Regardless, good teachers (instructors, professors, educators) at any level and of any subject need to continually improve—the Tickle Trunk requires replenishment, maintenance, and upgrading. Indeed, survival in any profession requires effort, and good teachers are aware of this. Good teaching, hopefully, leads to successful learning, and this should be the ultimate goal for everyone.

## Good teaching and the good teacher

I teach English to both international and domestic post-secondary students and have been teaching (EAL/EAP/EFL) for quite a spell. I respect all students and believe that they deserve a teacher who is compassionate, competent, and creative. Throw in a dash of motivation, gumption, and the odd ripping yarn, and we get what is, in my view, a good teacher (McLean, 2018). Do I fall into this esteemed category? Well, I try. More importantly, I am keenly aware that it requires both upkeep and updates because the life of a teacher usually involves an unwanted dose of chaos. Regarding basic human desire for order, Steven Pinker (2018) warns: “Not only does the universe not care about our desires, but in the natural course of events it will appear to thwart them, because there are so many more ways for things to go wrong than for them to go right” (p. 24). So, good teachers require the ability to handle whatever the universe throws their way.

Pinpointing what a good teacher is, however, poses a bit of a conundrum. Nonetheless, we need to look for and learn from good teachers. Evidence-based practices are essential, but there seems to be a myriad of potential confounding variables that cannot, or should not, be quantified or placed on a graph. What about personality, temperament, motivation, emotional stability, wily experience, enthusiasm, sense of humour, or even one’s state of mind on a particular day? Of course, well-constructed syllabi, solid subject material, sufficient tools of technology, and interesting activities can support good teaching, but what about the teacher? Aye, there’s the rub. Without the good teacher, the best laid plans can go awry. Good teaching requires a little more, and this little more, which I call the metaphorical Tickle Trunk, is what good teachers seem to have. This, along with the other more technical side of instruction, is what we need to develop to survive in our demanding profession.

Broaching the elusive issue, what is good teaching? This is somewhat of a quandary that has never been sufficiently nailed down. Ask different people and you will get different answers, especially at many educational institutions these days. Utzl, a professor of psychology at Mount Royal University argued, and I agree, that “there is no agreement as to what is effective teaching...we have no universal agreed upon standard measure of effective teaching” (as cited in Flaherty, 2017, para. 3). Nasser-Abu Alhija (2016) highlighted that while there has been increased attention on good teaching, attempts to define it have focused on what good teachers do, perhaps without enough examination of characteristics and perceptions. This is unfortunate because given the presupposition that good teaching and successful learning go hand in hand, educators worth their salt should know that the process involves not only subject knowledge and preparation but also many other elements, including interest, passion, resources, time, stamina, and a penchant for uncluttering obscurity. There is a lot more going on here.

Berman (2015) reasoned that teaching is both an art and a science; in fact, good teaching is good teaching, regardless of the discipline taught. I could not agree more; however, I would add that teaching is also a craft—something that one develops, hones, and polishes. Indeed, some teachers are naturals who have a seemingly axiomatic grasp of this awareness and proceed effortlessly, at least on the surface. I am sure that we can all think of a colleague the likes of this—that teacher who unpretentiously exudes confidence, serenely commands respect, and naturally elicits a warm glow from past and present students. Many of us have encountered such a poised professional and enviously wondered how the sage does it without the gnashing of teeth that normally goes along with a day in class. Most people, when reminiscing about or pining for long lost school days, can recall that one rare unicorn-like teacher who left an impression, and that is the one who excelled at the craft of good teaching. Wouldn’t it be great to be able to bottle and sell this combination of knowledge, know-how, and knack? Sure, profit through education should not be the main goal, but a nudge by Adam Smith’s (1904) invisible hand is not necessarily detrimental if it enhances learning opportunities and outcomes. Nonetheless, we should be inquisitive and want to know how good teachers ply their trade.

## What do teachers think?

We all have our own teaching tendencies, tricks, and philosophies, and this is good. Diversity of thought and teaching style are essential. Without these, we risk operating in a cooker-cutter-like environment. No thanks. Nevertheless, good teaching

may also be composed of some common elements. In a qualitative study, Duarte (2013) asked a group of university business lecturers in Australia about their conceptions of good teaching. The results produced some salient themes, including an emphasis on enthusiasm and passion, and identified good teaching as a learner-focused approach that is dynamic and socially-constructed. Duarte added that good teaching requires reflection and lifelong learning on the part of the educator combined with the provision of constructive feedback and well-designed curriculum and assessment.

Moreover, Duarte's participants all stressed the importance of motivating students to learn. One commented that "students learn through invoking emotions...this is what makes learning 'memorable' and lifelong" (p. 11). Another explained that good teaching also involves awareness of different learning styles and that educators need to design learning activities that consider the needs and backgrounds of individual students. Duarte suggested that good teaching occurs when educators can motivate students, both intrinsically and extrinsically, and use innovative teaching activities. Good teachers are passionate about the content, encourage collaboration, and reflect on their own teaching. Along with sound advice, this certainly seems like a tall order, hence the need for a deeper Tickle Trunk.

Berman (2015), in an article regarding good teaching and medical educators, offers some valuable advice that should be heeded by educators of any subject. Getting to know the students is the first on the list, and this is a two-way street: teachers should encourage students to ask questions of them. This is something I always do in the first few classes of every term. Most students inevitably inquire about homework, assignments, and expectations, but some do ask about hobbies, teaching experience, and reasons for becoming a teacher. Great questions. Berman also advised that we avoid teaching what we do not know. Solid tip, but I must admit that I have at times had to wing it when in doubt. I confess to resorting to canards such as "*oh, that's the Canadian spelling*" or "*well, that depends on the grammar to which you are referring, prescriptive or descriptive?*" Who has not deflected, stretched the truth, or embellished a tad during a class? Alas, savvy students easily see through these shams and usually know if the teacher is flying by the seat of the pants. The point is that teachers should be confident in the subject matter yet still have the composure to admit to not knowing something. Students appreciate honesty.

Another suggestion offered by Berman (2015) relates to tamping down the sage on the stage approach. Of course, some lessons necessitate a lecture, but for learning to flourish, students need to be involved. Sure, some educators may look askance at holding court less, and Berman acknowledged this, but he explained that while "active learning can sometimes cause a traditionally trained teacher to feel a loss of control...learning is not and never will be a spectator sport!" (p. 388). This is especially true in the language classroom, in which I think I can safely champion the importance of communicative activities. Most students do not want to be relegated to the role of benchwarmer. Students who are not encouraged to use the language will never become proficient in it.

Among Berman's (2015) suggestions to educators, the needs for flexibility and reflection stand out. Most teachers have surely had the experience of the dreaded lesson plan flop. "But it worked in my last class..." Yes, plans can go awry, and that is just a fact of school life. Different classes are made up of different students who have different personalities, moods, tastes, principles, identities, abilities, and funny bones. Therefore, teachers need to be flexible and adapt accordingly. Furthermore, flexibility coincides with reflection because we need to think about what worked, what did not, why it worked, why it did not, and what needs to change for future success. If it ain't broke don't fix it may work now and then, but aphorisms, pithy as they may sound, have limitations. Yes, Fate can be sly at times, and this is why we need to have a Plan B.

Moreover, as Berman (2015) reminds us, and this may royally irk some educators, "regardless of the discipline taught, neither the degrees that have been earned nor the courses that have been completed by the teacher have been found to correlate with student success" (p. 392). Here, we face the correlation vs. causality puzzle. Does a graduate degree make one a better teacher and lead to more student success? Well, subject-specific knowledge is indispensable, but so is the ability to communicate said knowledge with students of all stripes. Good teachers of any subject in any educational setting need to engage in developing sound pedagogy and critical reflection in order to improve, adapt, and survive.

Survival can also depend on one's personality and willingness to adapt and improve. In a study on the views of second language teacher education students in Southeast Asia and Mexico, Richter and Herrera (2017) observed that teachers' positive personality traits and acceptance of new ways of teaching contribute to perceptions of good teaching. The

participants were practicing teachers who returned to school in Singapore and Mexico to update their teaching skills and knowledge. The researchers found that despite geographical and cultural differences, the participants “demonstrated a remarkable degree of agreement about the desirable characteristics and pedagogical behaviours of language teachers” (p. 192). Participants also expressed that personality and rapport are essential for teaching excellence. In fact, these factors rated higher than teacher experience. The authors explained that the countries represented in the study (Mexico, Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Vietnam) are often characterized as pedagogically conservative; however, the participants tended to reject traditional styles (e.g., transmissional approaches and rote learning) and instead embraced more modern teaching approaches. This is encouraging because as the role of the teacher continues to evolve, teachers who can adapt and survive are the ones who will lead us and our students into the future.

As a language teacher, I agree with Berman’s (2015) advocacy for a student-centered yet introspective approach, Duarte’s (2013) call for reflection and awareness of different learning styles, and Richter and Herrera’s (2017) emphasis on teacher characteristics and adaptability. I also support the constructivist school of thought and can appreciate its social learning bent, with perhaps some help from scaffolding and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the distance between what learners are able to actually do and a proximal level that they might reach with the guidance of the educator (Warford, 2011). Taking Piaget’s view that growth of knowledge can be viewed as a progressive construction, teachers can not only introduce new concepts but also guide learners on their journey (Jean Piaget Society, 2014). This approach, in my opinion, works better than trying to fill empty vessels and Locke’s tabula rasa, or relying too heavily on behaviorism and the positive and negative reinforcement of Skinner, or the classical conditioning of Pavlov. Then again, high grades and scholarships do motivate many learners, and the influence of both internal and external motivation cannot be ignored. Most students want a career and the ability to earn money, so we must be both idealistic and realistic—a bit of a paradox.

## What do students think?

Regarding language teaching and student opinion, Chang (2016), after examining divergent perspectives of the good language teacher in Taiwan, reaffirmed what I have long thought: “the quandary in a language classroom occurs when a substantial gap exists between teacher perceptions of good language teaching and student perceptions of a good language teacher” (para. 3). I find this is like when I share a rip-roaring witticism, bon mot, or joke with my teenage daughter, and she brushes it off with the disapproving adolescent eye-roll. Teachers (and dads) may think that they are clicking on all levels, but students (and teenage daughters) may beg to differ. Chang also reported that whereas some teachers value reflection and updating teaching knowledge, some students value being treated fairly. Therein lies the gap.

Chang (2016) also brought up another undeniable truth: each class is unique, and this relates to what I mentioned earlier about the dreaded lesson plan flop. Most teachers have no doubt had the experience of bounding down the hallway after a particularly successful activity, only to have it superbly fail later with a different class. It is rather amazing how this happens. Yes, as Pinker (2018) warned, it seems at times that the universe is out to get us. So, good teachers need to be able to read the class, try to understand the students, and if possible, empathize. Chang (2016) noted that many students regard empathy toward students as crucial and expect fairness and respect in class. Consequently, Chang recommended that teachers openly communicate teaching beliefs and class expectations at the beginning of a semester. This is fantastic advice. However, problems can arise when some students show up days or weeks after the start of a term. It is challenging to help these students catch up, and they are often the ones who struggle and, potentially, express displeasure when grades come into the picture. So, good teachers must have not only classroom prowess but also time and patience for students who missed important information, which can be rather challenging. Nevertheless, open communication can reduce or mitigate conflicts and misunderstandings, and this can be positive for the emotional states of both students and teachers.

Emotional stability is also desirable for what most students look for in a teacher—steady leadership. In a study on students’ preferences for lecturers’ personality, Tan, Mansi, and Furnham (2017) surveyed 260 undergraduate students from three London-based British universities and found that “emotional instability was unanimously reported to be the least-preferred trait in lecturers...Indeed, emotional stability in lecturers is highly prized by students. They want them to be

resilient, able to cope with stress and stable as opposed to being moody" (p. 8). So, good teachers need to be resilient and display a calm, cool, and collected demeanor. Tricky, but not impossible to exhibit with the right temperament.

Emotional stability can help summon enthusiasm. Keller, Goetz, Becker, Morger, and Hensley (2014), in a study with Swiss high school students and teachers, investigated the importance of "dispositional teacher enthusiasm, indicated by teachers' positive affect and positive emotional expressivity" (p. 34). They found that dispositional teacher enthusiasm positively relates to students' interest. This seems obvious, but then again, language teachers beware: maintaining zesty enthusiasm five days a week for an entire semester is at best the path to fatigue and at worst the road to burn out. This reminds me a character in a P.G. Wodehouse (2009) book: "I think the trouble with Freddie...is that he always gets off to a flying start. He's a good-looking sort of chap who dances well and can wiggle his ears, and the [class] is dazzled for the moment, and this encourages him..." (p. 107). A semester can start out this way, but sustainability is the key. Enthusiasm, like everything else, is best enjoyed in moderation. Students want it, we need it, but Reason should guide it.

Along with sustainable enthusiasm and a positive demeanor, some students are looking for other qualities in their teachers. In a survey of Tunisian university students, Belhaj and Ben Abderrahman (2015) looked at students' perceptions of the good university teacher and concluded that Tunisian students "focus more on human qualities of university teachers at the expense of their scientific skills...they expect more flexibility, generosity, and tolerance on the part of the university teachers" (p. 60). These students want teachers who are generous, attentive, serving, and indulgent. The authors suggested that we need to "reform our teaching practices and to refocus more on students" (Belhaj & Ben Abderrahman, 2015, p. 61). Well, I can go along with the basic premise, but there should be a limit to one's level of indulgence. Students need to develop independent learning skills, and too much spoon-feeding may hinder the process. I also think that most students respect teachers who do not pander to every student whim.

Other students are looking for affinity. In a study at the University of the Balearic Islands, Casero Martinez (2016) asked students about what they consider important in a good teacher, and many indicated that they preferred teachers who were friendly and likeable. The author explained that an affinity for the teacher can be beneficial as it could make students more predisposed and motivated. On the other hand, if students find the teacher friendly or likeable, then "an affinity between the instructor and the student's personal characteristics might lead to a certain halo effect, influencing the student's overall assessment of the instructor" (Casero Martinez, 2016, p. 11). So, there you have it: the halo effect can work both ways. Good to know.

In addition, all kinds of educators are encountering another growing group of learners—international students, many of whom have different expectations and needs. Redden (2017), explaining the results of an ELS Educational Services survey of 662 students at 23 US colleges, noted that many international students want their instructors to "provide more feedback; seek to understand international students' perspectives; make classroom materials available after class; provide examples of completed assignments; and provide non-U.S. examples in course contents" (para. 2). I cannot comment on what is happening in American classrooms, but I can relay a concern of some professors in the Canadian university in which I teach. While EAL teachers like me know where their students come from, some professors do not know who is an international student and who is not, especially in big multi-cultural classrooms or lecture halls. Therefore, we need to be aware that not all students are from the same country or culture, and not all students share the same concerns. Indeed, there is usually diversity not only between groups but also within them. Therefore, international students may require more support, so open communication with the international office and student support services is essential.

Furthermore, more communication among educators within institutions can benefit international students. For example, in addition to encouraging language teachers to sit in on some of their lectures, professors could visit the ESL/EAL/EFL department and talk with students and teachers about academic integrity and expectations: we want to be included in the bigger institutional picture but are often viewed as distant cousins in a bailiwick on the fringe of campus. Many of our students move on to successful academic careers, so the pathways from language courses to degree and diploma programs should be made as smooth as possible. Good teachers in all areas can work together to make this happen.

Regardless of type of student, individual perceptions about teachers and their aptitude can play a role in successful learning. In a study of Israeli post-secondary students' conceptions of good teaching, Nasser-Abu Alhija (2016) found that most students reported that when rating teachers, they perceived assessment as a critical factor, followed by goals

achieved, relations with students, and teaching methods and characteristics. Yes, students care about grades, and this is natural because of the competitive system in which they study and the real world in which they need to succeed. Nasser-Abu Alhija also indicated that many students value explaining teaching goals, expectations, and anticipated outcomes in a clear and understandable manner. This is especially important for international students.

On the other hand, Nasser-Abu Alhija (2016) also warned that, in the study, students with different characteristics exhibited different preferences for teachers. "Gender, field of study, age, and type of education institution affect students' perceptions of good teaching" (Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2016, p. 8). For example, students in the social sciences placed more emphasis on instructor-student relations compared to students in the natural sciences. Therefore, Nasser-Abu Alhija warned that "student ratings of teaching quality should be considered with caution" (p. 8). We can surely agree that not all students think alike and that their perceptions of good teaching vary accordingly. We must recognize that students see things through their own specific lenses. We must also realize that we are not going to please all people all the time. Indeed, if you, dear teacher, have ever been disheartened by a less-than-stellar student rating, anonymous or otherwise, welcome to the club.

## Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)

Like it or not, the issue of student evaluation of teaching (SET) may come into play (McLean, 2018). The role of the student can include being a source of feedback. Constructive criticism? Maybe. Popularity contest? Perhaps. Venting opportunity? Sure. Worthwhile? I will leave that one up to you, dear reader. The difficulty lies in what Uttl (as cited in Flaherty, 2017) posed as the inescapable issue of SET: just what is being measured—student satisfaction or teaching effectiveness? I would argue that more often than not student satisfaction wins out. Uttl also noted that institutions have to decide on what is more important: student satisfaction or academic achievement.

Uttl, White, and Wong Gonzalez (2017) explained that "student evaluation of teaching ratings are used to evaluate faculty's teaching effectiveness based on a widespread belief that students learn more from highly rated professors" (p. 22). However, their meta-analysis of multi-section research revealed that "the studies do not support the claims that students learn more from more highly rated professors" (p. 39). They found no significant correlations between the SET ratings and learning. Uttl, White and Wong Gonzalez warned of the claim that being on the lookout for positive SETs can lead to grade inflation and work deflation. So, teachers who can use SET information to tailor difficulty and length of assignments might be better off because they may get higher evaluations.

Uttl, White and Wong Gonzalez (2017) acknowledged that SET feedback can be beneficial for the educator's use; however, if results are used for judging teaching effectiveness and/or making high stakes administrative decisions about instructor livelihood, then controversy abounds. SET does allow students to have a say, but according to Uttl, White and Wong Gonzalez, students' feelings after a course are likely to depend on many factors that have nothing to do with teaching effectiveness. For example, the authors warn that some students are disgruntled because they got low grades, suffered from lack of interest, or were accused of cheating or plagiarism. Other students may even be affected by an educator's looks or accent; we can never really know for sure.

Felton, Koper, Mitchell, and Stinson (2008) took a slightly different approach and analyzed web-based student evaluation of teachers (Ratemyprofessors.com). According to these researchers, "A large percentage of American college students who post professor evaluations at Ratemyprofessors.com consider courses to be of high quality when the professor is attractive and the course is easy" (p. 46). Students rate their professors on Easiness, Helpfulness, Clarity, Overall Quality, and the *pièce de résistance*, *Hotness*. Well, I'm out. Of course, these criteria are not used in institutional tools, thankfully, but many of the students who bother to post online probably also do the institutional surveys, and "some disgruntled and less competent students will use the site as a vehicle for retaliation" (p. 46).

Regarding encouraging winds of change, however, after much pressure from a social media campaign in June 2018 and threat of boycott, Ratemyprofessors.com abruptly removed all chili pepper ratings from its site (Flaherty, 2018). Moreover, in a precedent-setting case in Canada, "an Ontario arbitrator has directed Ryerson University to ensure that student

evaluations of teaching, or SETs, are not used to measure teaching effectiveness for promotion or tenure" (Farr, 2018, para. 9). The arbitrator's decision was in part based on concerns about human-rights issues, including biases based on gender, ethnicity, accent, age, even attractiveness of teachers. Flaws in methodology and ethical concerns around confidentiality and informed consent were also cited.

We hope for balance. Student evaluations are often used as part of the instructor evaluation process in many educational institutions. Some teachers may claim that reading them can feel somewhat uncomfortable, to say the least. Nevertheless, we do need feedback, and we can use it as we engage in reflection on teaching. Therefore, good teachers need not only experience, knowledge, and ability but also the wherewithal to take criticism along with praise.

## Final thoughts

Being a teacher is not getting any easier despite advancements in educational technology, of which I gladly take advantage. Wired to the ears, today's students certainly have game—they are tech savvy and have undoubtedly developed the necessary knack for digital dexterity and fingered speech in our modern, broadband, Wi-Fi society. And more importantly for teachers, going from chalk to markers to devices, those who are willing to traverse the learning curve and modernize their Tickle Trunks can avail themselves of the ever-advancing tools of the trade. This can be both exciting and intimidating, but given the choice, I would choose an iPad over chalk dust any day of the week.

Furthermore, as learning curves steepen and students' needs widen, teachers today are facing even more pressure. De Costa and Norton (2017) argued that the concepts of good teaching and the good teacher have "come under scrutiny in an age of globalization, transnationalism, and increased demands for accountability" (p. 3). The authors also explained that such scrutiny has garnered research interest in the issue of teacher burnout and emotional challenges that educators face. I would certainly like to see more of this research done. Teaching should be enjoyable, but please remember: "Never ask while you are doing it what you are doing is fun" (Hitchens, 2010, p. 341). If you have to ask, it is not.

Undeniably, good teaching is good teaching. There are some people, including me, who believe that the master craftsman cannot always be truly analyzed. For example, Scottish raconteur/actor Billy Connolly, when asked about his comedic ability, admitted that he does not think about why he is funny: "Out it pours, and I'll never understand it, and don't want to...it [the performance] overtakes [my] body" (Strouboulopoulos, 2007). I have also heard retired Canadian ice hockey hero Wayne Gretzky explain his knack for scoring prowess in his heyday: "I go to where the puck is going, not where it's been" (2009, "The Great Quote", para 1). Hands down, Aretha Franklin was the Queen of Soul. Unfortunately, without such innate ability, we ungifted souls need to stick to the path of lifelong learning. Being a professional takes effort, so regular teachers like me have to work a little harder to dazzle the room without the aid of superstar perfection. If it is any consolation, evolutionary biology professor emeritus Jerry Coyne (2009) clarified that "natural selection does not yield perfection—only improvements over what came before. It produces *fitter*, not the *fittest*" (p. 13). Accordingly, teachers should not fall into a game of survival of the fittest; rather, we all need to strive to be *fitter*.

We can and should help one another to survive; there is room for many. We can become fitter, if not the Tickle Trunk personified, by continuing to develop, plan, teach, cooperate, evaluate, and reflect; and yes, some of these can be measured to a certain extent. Thus, there is a need for more scholarly research on teaching and learning (SoTL), especially in language classrooms, and we teachers need it to be real, useful, and practical. So, please keep an eye out for good teachers, talk to them, pick their brains, and help the rest of us out along the way. We can all benefit. Moreover, dear teachers, keep the Tickle Trunk teeming, replenish it regularly, and share with the rest of us. In the end, our students will win.

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