

Teaching Philosophy

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Language learning should not stop at the classroom door. It should extend outside to markets, parks, aquariums through sports and local clubs. I encourage students to explore local communities, take language outside and play with it in the contexts that inspire them most.

To help students take language beyond the classroom, I design in-classroom experiential learning lessons. A lesson I taught on California State and National Parks at the Pacific Grove Adult School did just that. My students read an authentic brochure from a park they would like to visit, then discussed with their classmates outdoor activities, such as hiking or rock climbing, one could do while visiting the park. The activity provided students with opportunities to negotiate for meaning, while also educating and motivating them to explore natural attractions close to their home. Teaching outdoor education lessons provides opportunities for students to be active learners, both inside and outside of the classroom.

I believe lesson coherence, motivation and curiosity are essential to teaching and learning. My activities target both language and content objectives, and ensure students leave my classroom with meaningful experiences. These twin objectives tie stages together and unify lessons as a whole. To motivate students, I bring in realia, use unaltered texts and share personal stories. I believe strongly that if students can relate lessons to meaningful and realistic contexts, they pay closer attention and stay motivated. For example, I taught a project-based lesson on “clothing and fashion” aimed at learning clothing vocabulary and reviewing the present continuous and simple present. It began with a discussion of current world-fashion photos to grab students’ curiosity. It finished with students designing their own haute couture from newspaper, modeling it down a “catwalk” and describing its fashion design. Students’ interaction and reflection papers showed that hands-on activities, realia and realistic contexts captivate and engage students.

I build learner-centered classrooms. I use scaffolding techniques that break down structures into simple forms so students can find patterns and rules on their own. For example, when I taught a beginner Braille lesson for university students attending the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS) in 2014, I presented the alphabet progressively in groups of letters. This maximized student-learning opportunities as they found patterns between the groups before encoding and decoding full words. The technique sparked student’s curiosity and intrinsic motivation, while also facilitating autonomy.

When lessons do not go as planned, I adapt and create new learning and teaching opportunities for my students. During a lesson I taught on sea animals in Monterey, California, a student asked the difference between seals and sea lions. I assigned the question as homework: students researched the two animals and drew a picture of them, labeling the differences. They shared their illustrations with the class the next day. I could have explicitly told the students the answer, but I wanted to challenge them to take responsibility for their own learning by connecting them to local and global communities.

Language learning is a life-long journey. Through reflective and interactive practices, I give my students the tools they need to succeed on their expedition.