

My developing philosophy for teaching English is as follows: I firmly believe that students are *individuals*, with unique backgrounds and interests, capable of making choices, with great potential – and should be treated and mentored as such. There are three main principles I will hold central to my approach of teaching second language learners: 1) Teachers should focus on teaching students, not lessons: It is vital to be aware of each student's purpose of learning and identity—both current and ideal. 2) Material should be authentic, interesting, and appropriate for learners. 3) Teachers should promote and honor students' agency.

I believe that one of the most important aspects of teaching is to treat your students as individuals. Especially in a language learning environment where foreign culture can seem overwhelming, learners will do better when they feel someone cares about their learning and progress. I plan to teach mainly in ESL classrooms, and thus, I believe there is a strong sense of importance to preserve and honor native cultures while integrating the language and culture of English. Since “one's linguistic ability [is] intertwined with one's sense of worth, self-esteem, and self-efficacy,” it is paramount that students understand that English is not meant to replace their native language but add to their identity and abilities (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 76). As Ellis states, “Instruction needs to take into account the learner's built-in syllabus” (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014, p. 37). As teachers are aware of both the background of a student and their objectives, learning will be elevated beyond possibility otherwise.

Another principle that is fundamental to the acquisition of language learning is that students are taught interesting and authentic material. Textbooks, reading material, listening materials, writing prompts should all be oriented to the learners' goals and target objectives. Without something to spark their interest, students will lose both the motivation and the desire to learn and engage in learning English. The same is true if they do not see the direct correlation

between the classroom and the outside world. Because my focus is on refugees and immigrants, many of these individuals are learning English on the basis of survival, with the innate desire to use the language outside the classroom. As a teacher, it is important for me to incorporate tasks and scenarios that students will run into as they live their everyday lives and not to only demonstrate how to create a thesis sentence. Knowing your students and their goals/desires is also critical to ensuring that the content you are presenting is not only instructive but useful and applicable. Content that is authentic in both content and context is necessary for adults to become fully competent in their L2 (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014, p. 108). In order to develop authentic language learners, materials need to be authentic at every level of proficiency.

The exercising of a student's agency is critical to the life-long process of learning another language. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to not only promote agency but provide students with opportunities to exercise agency. As I encourage my students to consciously choose to put forth an effort to learn English, both inside and outside of the classroom, they will gain more than I could teach them by force. As stated by Brown and Lee (2015), "higher self-efficacy correlates to individuals' greater persistence when facing difficulties, leading them to exert more effort and make better use of learning strategies" (p. 90). As I focus my class around "promoting learner autonomy," my students will be taught strategies for learning and self-monitoring that can carry on beyond the classroom. (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014, p. 11). By inspiring my students to use their agency, they will be better equipped to face language in a real-world context.

References

Brown, D. H., & Lee, H. (2015). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (4th Edition)* (4th ed.). Pearson Education ESL.

Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Snow, M. A. (Eds.). (2014). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (4th ed.). National Geographic Learning.