Teaching Philosophy

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I moved to the United States when I was ten years old. As a fifth grader, I shied away from participating in class and talking with my classmates because I didn't understand English and didn't know how to express myself. I played computer games during class and watched cartoons after school. At the end of the school year, I was so behind academically that I almost had to repeat the grade. I had an ESL teacher and she was helpful to a certain point. Nonetheless, it wasn't until I had a burning desire to improve my English that I started to take actionable steps and prioritized my focus. I started reading. For my first chapter book, "Maniac McGee", my father sat down with me each night to read with me. We looked up each unfamiliar word and read paragraph by paragraph. It took us many nights to finish reading the book. After that, my confidence boosted and I went on to read thirty more books that summer. I immersed myself in each new world unveiled in front of my eyes. Soon, learning English was no longer like pulling teeth and it certainly wasn't just about memorizing meaningless vocabulary. Once sixth grade started, I was getting As and A+s in my English class.

Through my own experience of learning English, I discovered the important roles that intrinsic motivation and confidence play in one's language learning journey. Hence, my teaching purpose is to inspire students to find their intrinsic motivation for learning, which allows them to learn even when they encounter challenges and struggles in the future. My short term goal for teaching is to provide a comfortable and safe space for students to practice and make mistakes. My long term goal is to encourage students to take the initiative in their own language learning journey, to gain the confidence to put the progress of learning into their own hands, and to discover what makes them feel alive.

Travel and communication have increased over the past decades, and we seek more balanced ways of effectively educating our students in this globalized world. Since I value student-centered teaching, my teaching style blends The Communicative Approach and The Comprehension Approach.

For The Communicative Approach, I like using authentic materials to help students familiarize themselves with the culture that they are learning about. For instance, when I taught about different titles in workplaces, I had the student go around and read real signs that hung in front of people's offices at Harvard University. Furthermore, information gaps encourage students to communicate with each other in information sharing, and role play places students in a real-world context, providing a more realistic environment for students to practice. When I taught public speaking to young Asian women, I took them to community events where hundreds of people were present, and had them stand in front of
everyone to introduce themselves in English and Chinese. For The Comprehension Approach, I like to teach using the target language in class, as it encourages students to think in the target language, which increases their adaptation of the target language. Using visual aids, especially objects and physical actions to demonstrate a physical situation help students associate what they are seeing to what they sound like. Moreover, role reversal is a great way to put students in charge of their own learning and to learn from their peers. In the past, I had more advanced students taking turns acting as teachers to share what they learned with class.

I will be mostly teaching elementary, middle school and high school students, and teaching university students and professionals as needed. My teaching style motivates students by increasing their engagement through activities and teamwork.

In my lesson plans and teaching, one of the teaching techniques I prefer to use is the 80/20 rule, which allows students to learn through focused mode and diffused mode. For example, in the conversation classes that I co-teach with my colleague, we let students read a different article each week on a relevant global topic. During class time, we go over key vocabulary, grammar and topics in the article, and then let students break out into smaller groups and spend 10-20 minutes discussing these topics on their own or working on a project, while we facilitate in the background. Afterwards, student representatives from each group present to the whole class on their group's opinions or discoveries. Typically, we have two discussions per class that is an hour long. This helps them become more familiar with what they learned, gain confidence and eventually master the skills.

I prefer to serve as a guide and let students discover their intrinsic motivations. Students become more motivated when they figure things out on their own through trial and error during practice. During class, I use teacher talk and warm language, as well as body language (as much as we can virtually) in the focused mode of instruction to get the new concepts and materials across to students. I do this to lower students' affective filters and make them feel more comfortable and confident in participating in class and interacting with other students.

In the warm-up activities, I have discussion questions open for the whole class, and these questions make students think critically on their opinions and reasoning. When I instruct, I like to use scaffolding to model behavior by providing multiple models and then let students do guided and independent practices. At the end, I do a formative evaluation for students through providing feedback on assignments or through portfolio assessments.