

Elizabeth Naughton-Henderson - Teaching Philosophy

My passion for teaching English learners began when I first started tutoring ESL students in English writing. I loved hearing about students' backgrounds and how their life experiences shaped them, and I loved seeing their growth and gratitude for every English-learning milestone. Something I noticed over time was how much easier it is for students to write about concepts or experiences they perceive as immediately relevant: their own stories, their future aspirations, and their values. For example, writing assignments prompting students to write about immigrating to the United States or about their own culture/family challenges students to recall details and build off their preexisting knowledge. On the other hand, assignments that require students to investigate their future pursuits can push language learners into new and applicable learning territories of their target language. Although these types of assignments similarly help *all* students, I have observed how they are particularly helpful when it comes to students learning English as a second language. Thus, as an ESL instructor, my teaching philosophy revolves around Communicative and Social Constructivist approaches, building students' fluency with communicative language instruction through both individualized and multi-modal instruction.

My ESL classroom is a place of high focus on conversational competency, contextual socialization, and practical every-day use by balancing fluency with accuracy. I want students to be able to use the language that fits their niche functions of the English-speaking world, whether that be academia, trade, or any industry into which they hope to advance. Students develop intrinsic value of language learning when they see how each puzzle-piece fits into their own bigger picture, which is why I will often task my students to complete guided assignments with learning goals in their own choice of topic. For example, I may give a speech assignment to push students' formal English-speaking ability by presenting a topic that applies to their future requiring cue-cards and visual aids as level-appropriate. In another example, I may ask students to practice English writing using different kinds of formats, such as a blog post or an email to a future employer. By using genre-based and content-based pedagogy, my students will learn about the different kinds of vocabulary use and cultural expectations that may apply to English-users in various context

It is my view that students acquire language best with minimized pressure in the classroom environment and by using a variety of stimulating activities, which is also how I learned my second language. I remember the language anxiety I felt trying to produce speech or

writing in my target language and how the anxiety often hindered my learning process. I want my students to feel comfortable making mistakes while producing English because learner progress is often best with boldness and receptiveness correction. In my English classroom, students can expect to be in group projects and collaborative discussion and look forward to learning new content by utilizing as many different senses as possible: sound, visual aids, and when appropriate, smell, taste and touch. Regardless of my students age-range, I will make my class an active one, for example by acting out dialogues and plays, bringing content-related educational props into the classroom for students to touch, cooking cultural food to consume in class, and other supplemental activities to encourage individual creativity.

Regarding assignments and assessments, I believe that providing guiding questions, not only rubrics, helps students to creatively brainstorm their answers. Even when it comes to more technical concepts such as grammar instruction, guiding questions can provide needed scaffolding. I believe it is best to start with a top-down approach in class (such as explaining a grammar rule explicitly) and then allow students to practice following with a more inductive approach, correcting some errors in the beginning and then allowing students to perceive their own errors more and more as their English improves. I want learning English to be fun; however, I also believe that language *functionality* and *accuracy* hold a careful balance-- both of equal importance- which is why I plan to administer low-stakes assessments in regular intervals throughout the semester or learning period. It is important that students know exactly what to prepare for on assessments, including the expectation that they improve their ability to read, write, comprehend, and creatively produce English. All assignments leading up to assessments will gradually build up students' ability to perform what will be covered on the test.

My hope as a TESOL instructor is to ultimately help my students reach their full potential, no matter their native language, their background, or where they envision themselves as an English user. With my past experiences and current teaching development, I am determined to continuously foster my skills as a qualified English teacher who is culturally sensitive and competent.