Teaching Philosophy

By Eddie Landsberg

I have been teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) as well as ESL, English as a Second Language for over 25, initially entering the classroom because of a love of other cultures, helping others well as the process of teaching itself, which also extends from my interest in Social Psychology as well as Learning Theory. To be direct: I struggled as a learner in school, and learned the hard way that teachers are in an enormous role to empower students to learn, accomplish goals and boost their self esteem. Years later, I wound up living and working in Japan learning what it is like to teach immigrants as well as the challenges of being an immigrant myself. This also impacted my teaching.

I​n regard to my teaching goals, I believe that every class is different, so as teachers we need to vary our ways of thinking, not only in regards to what constitutes good teaching, but even what teaching, or the purpose of our teaching is. This means that part of my goal is to explore the reasons why learners are in the classroom, their expectations and my role as a mentor, advocate and agent of the organization. Regardless, my ultimate goal for any class is to help students engage in fun and interactive activites which empower them to communicate, while at the same time taking pleasure and pride in what I do. (This may sound selfish, but the truth is, it is unreasonable to expect students to enjoy classes unless they can feel my own energy and enthusiasm.) On top of this, having completed my Ed.M and having served as a head teacher, I also enjoy training other teachers as well as experimenting with new methods and approaches.

*The Challenge of Teaching*

I​ believe that the biggest challenge of teaching is flexibility and willingness to let go of pre-conceptions. For example, some methods may work incredibly for one group of students, or students from a particular culture, but might not match up with another. This means, that to be a good teacher it is important to be able to reinvent yourself constantly. That said, there are several basic approaches I take in most of my teaching.

1) My classes are communicative, and activity based. (I don’t like to see a room full of passive learners. I want to see lot’s of interaction, and enjoy weaving between the pairs and groups as they experience the joys of communication in English relative to the goals of the lessons.

2) I take an integrated approach when possible, teaching reading, writing, speaking and listening together.

3) My classes make strong use of peer and social learning. But this does not mean that I don't incorporate other styles, as an example, some teachers avoid choral repetition and dictations, but I've found these very useful in helping students with listening and pronunciation, and students from some cultures may even feel comfortable with this until they get better acclimated with communicative style lessons which has large amounts of peer work.  Likewise, I don’t think “teaching to the test” or following curriculums that I might not necessarily agree with is problematic. Some students have expectations of teacher formality, so sometimes it is important to play the role and win student trust from there, also acknowledging goals of the students and organization, then finding ways to expand for the purpose of achieving balanced results.

I​n regards to communicative learning approaches, I believe that ultimately students need to learn through practical interaction. . That said, a weak point of many communicative teachers is that they're sometimes afraid to give targeted corrections in certain areas. In contrast, structured methodologies give students a chance to practice new material in controlled contexts and improve their mastery without constant bombardment of ideas they never get a chance to master. The flip side of this; however, are methods that never give students a chance to form a community, to engage and creatively practice what they're learning. For this approach, ideal lessons are always evolving from controlled, to free-er and more creative practice. Beyond this, I also try to include Freiarian elements in my teaching (when appropriate) – meaning that beyond grammar and writing, I also aim to help students become stronger by mastering and explore the communities they live, including extension of it in the digital world.

A​s a final point, I believe that a major challenge facing teachers in various situations involves competition with outside world stresses as well as digital distractors. Communicative approaches force students to put away their electronic devices and engage and work together with their fellow peers; however, these approaches sometimes come with learner resistance that is compounded by digital distractions. Some students may not be used to learning outside the textbook, or may resent being told to put away their phones. This means that teachers such as myself must constantly hone our classroom management skills and think hard about the activities we plan. Ultimately, it is our job to distract the students from the digital devices, not the other way around. In the end, the key goal is to make the classes so fun and purposeful so that students don’t need to be told to pay attention. *They want to.*

*And this overall is my core teaching philosophy. Make engaged learning fun and purposeful.*