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Teaching Philosophy

As a young immigrant to the United States, my knowledge of English consisted only of a couple of greetings and the names of some colors. School was a struggle, especially my classes on language arts and social studies. But, thanks to a superb ESL teacher, it wasn't long before I began to find a passion for history and the stories I was now learning about in my second language.

Similarly, my first experience using Hebrew in Israel was nerve-wracking, and I'm now very well-acquainted with the thrill of communicating in a foreign language—the raised heartbeat, the gathering sweat, the simultaneous terror and ecstasy of it all. But thanks to wonderful Hebrew teachers who continued to motivate me despite frequent mistakes, I've developed a love for the language and its people.

This is why I teach languages. It's why I pursued a master's degree in Hebrew linguistics that heavily emphasized second language acquisition. It's why I'm currently teaching English to college students as a Fulbright Fellow in Israel and online to children in China. From experience as both a language learner and teacher, I know the power of effective language education for opening doors and for developing empathy.

In my professional role as a teacher, my short-term goals are to help my students master vocabulary and the intricacies of the grammar in order to reach proficiency in interpersonal communication. But my long-term purpose is to inspire my students to be self-motivated and to seek more than merely fulfilling a university requirement. I want them to develop a passion for their own education and to become life-long learners. I want to empower them with a deep understanding of cultures different than theirs.

My teaching style is founded primarily upon the Communicative Approach. In my classroom, communication in the target language is the norm. This allows my students to get a feel for the language, to create a sense of identity in it, and to immediately begin using it for interpersonal communication. In my various roles as both language learner and teacher, I've been amazed by the boost of increased motivation, determination, and effort that results from challenging but successful interactions in the target language. Genuine interpersonal communication is one of the greatest joys of the language-learning journey. Similarly, by incorporating the Direct Approach's emphasis on extensive exposure to comprehensible input—appropriate, yet demanding for their level—my students are able to continually develop their listening and reading skills.

I also place heavy emphasis on the use of authentic materials, such as newspapers, videos, or websites aimed at native speakers of the target language. By modifying the task (and not the material), I have found that I can help my students lower their affective filter for "real" materials and simultaneously develop greater confidence in their abilities. I take to heart the Affective-Humanistic Approach's focus on students' feelings. For this reason, an emphasis on fun activities and positive reinforcement is always a part of my lessons.

In order to successfully use these various approaches, I incorporate a variety of teaching techniques into my lesson plans. I have found that using a flipped classroom model—in which my students are expected to have studied the grammar and vocabulary at home—allows for the best use of class time. I always aim to stick to an overall practice/teaching ratio of 80/20 in the classroom. This means that communicative practice takes up the bulk of each lesson, which includes both guided and independent practice—though usually in pairs or small groups.

Something else that I encourage is the use of language learning strategies and metacognitive awareness of the learning process. I invite my students to think deeply about their motivations for learning and what they realistically hope to achieve. I then teach them about specific strategies they can use, such as making themselves accountable through planning and self-evaluation, using various mnemonic memory aids, and finding activities in the target language that they enjoy doing during their free time. I also recommend different educational technologies that I have found to be most effective, such as the use of spaced repetition systems. I consistently encourage my students to take their learning into their own hands. When I teach them to access the web in their target language—through blogs, forums, chat groups, or language exchange platforms—they are more likely to continue doing so in the future, thereby taking their language learning well beyond the walls of the classroom. These skills are especially relevant in today's interconnected world.

For me, the best part about teaching is seeing the joy in my students' eyes when they become witnesses of their own progress. Though the goal with each of them is language proficiency, I've come to realize that their learning styles and interests are usually highly diverse. For this reason, I continually strive to be a flexible language coach capable of helping them reach their own goals.