

To this point in my career, I have had the good fortune of working with a diverse pool of students in a range of contexts: adult language students (Canada), high school language students (Japan), students with special educational needs (visual and hearing impairments), undergraduates (engineering and TESOL majors), and visiting scholars (from Kazakhstan). Drawing upon this contextual diversity, my view on teaching is strictly student-centered, with the primary goal being to place my students in a position in which they can succeed. As will be discussed, the hallmark of this view is based in the ability to personally relate to students, as this personal connection serves to mediate the challenge of identifying and fostering individual conceptualizations of success.

I believe that my effectiveness as a teacher should be measured through the success of my students. However, I am also aware that 'success' is a relative term, and that each individual student I work with possesses different long-term goals, and that these goals necessitate a constant re-imagining of how I define success. As such, this approach requires that I maintain a close connection with each individual student, as it is only through knowing the students that I can determine how they define their own personal success. This approach manifests within my teaching contexts in several different ways, with inspiration drawn from a range of my own life experiences.

My time spent completing a degree in theater performance has left a lasting impression, primarily due to the continuing influence that my professors have had on me. One key lesson that has followed me throughout my teaching career is a need for individual acknowledgement whenever (and, preferably, as often as) possible. The idea behind this approach is that an acknowledged student is placed in a position of recognition, and not confined to being a member of the crowd. This acknowledgement can be simple, such as a personalized hello at the beginning of class, or far more complex, such as the use of formative assessment. From an instructional perspective, I believe providing a greater sense of personalization will increase the value students' place on their individual achievements. Though obviously challenging (language classes in Japan ranged between 20-40 students, TESOL preparation courses at MSU could have up to 30 students enrolled), I have found that making a concerted effort towards individual acknowledgement creates more dynamic interaction with students (both during and between classes), as well as allowing me a greater ability to target their specific needs.

While I recognize the necessity and value in summative assessment, and understand the significant role that it plays within educational contexts, as referenced above, I believe strongly in the importance of a formative approach. As previously stated, each individual student holds a different perspective on success (e.g., GPA, knowledge attained, course completion), and placing a focus solely on summative assessment does not take into account this variety. Therefore, as a teacher, I believe it is necessary that I recognize the specific needs of students, which allows me to provide individual-targeted feedback throughout their time spent with me. Such targeting provides students with a more rounded view of where they stand in relation to their own goals, and as a teacher, it provides me with a greater measurement of my ability to help them attain success.

A benefit of being a modern-day teacher is that there now exists a substantial history of teaching literature that I can draw upon. Another lesson from my theater days is that one cannot break the rules until one understands them. I believe that as a teacher, it is necessary to have an understanding of the methods that have come before, as it is these

methods that should be informing the approaches that I take in the present. A wider knowledge of past and current teaching methods allows for a larger repertoire of approaches that I can take, which is vital considering the emphasis I place on the individual differences in learning goals across students. Different goals likely require different methods, and it is my responsibility to be aware of the tools available to me. For example, from the perspective of a language instructor, despite communicative language teaching having informed the pedagogical approach I used in Canada, it was vital that I was able to organically incorporate tools of grammar-translation while teaching in Japan. As it was this latter approach that characterized my new classroom environment, the ability to bridge the two created an environment that was familiar for both students and teachers, while also opening the pedagogical doors for implementing something new.

A key area of my own expanding pedagogical knowledge is recognizing the importance of *accessibility* and *universal design*. Whether a class is delivered face-to-face, online, or through hybrid means, course content is increasingly made available via online interfaces (e.g., Moodle, Desire2Learn). While collaborating on the development of an online TESOL certificate course, I have endeavored to bring considerations of accessibility into my face-to-face classrooms (which have used Desire2Learn as a communicative hub). Syllabi, powerpoints, and handouts/worksheets have all been designed to provide equal access to the widest range of students possible. Techniques have included employing appropriate text styles and contrasts in course material and narrating/captioning class powerpoints. Considering the ever-evolving technology available to instructors, I feel it is vital that such technology is used in an appropriate way, and recognizing the values of accessibility in course design is key to this appropriateness.

My approach towards teaching has been based on a significant amount of reflexive thought. Specifically, the individualist approach that I subscribe to requires a significant amount of self-recognition in the identity that I present to students. To facilitate an open-relationship with students requires the creation of a friendly and welcoming environment, rooted in the atmosphere and mood put forth by the teacher. This entails a need on my part, as the teacher, to present an *open, friendly, and helpful* personality. For me, these three personality traits are heavily engrained in the profession of teaching, and the ability to naturally integrate them within a teaching approach should be the hallmark of a professional teacher. As such, I find that I am consistently reflecting upon my ongoing classroom experiences to ensure that I am indeed meeting these requirements. In the moments where I find that I am not, I use this self-reflection to determine where this disconnect exists and make the appropriate adjustments. One of my most fulfilling moments as a teacher thus far was an instance in which I helped a Japanese high school English language student overcome her difficulties on a writing assignment by extending the topic to include the character charms that adorned her cell phone. I was able to maintain the focus of the assignment, while at the same time raising her interest and motivation. As a teacher, it is necessary to be continually evolving, as we cannot expect the needs and desires of our students to remain static, and it is this self-reflection that allows me to consistently place a focus on the individual needs of students, and ultimately, what I can do to help them attain their individualized success.