Statement of My Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy has evolved from my experience as both a second language student and teacher. When creating curricula, reminding myself of what it is like to learn a second language is uppermost in my mind. I remember how intimidating it can be to communicate in class, how challenging it can be to use newly learned vocabulary and grammar accurately, and how important I feel it is to be corrected. As a result, creating a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment, teaching appropriate usage of vocabulary and grammar, and providing consistent error correction are the foundation of my teaching beliefs.

The more comfortable and involved students feel, the more likely they are to take risks and become active participants in class activities. Treating students with respect by truly listening to them and by tapping into their prior knowledge can give them the self-confidence they need to speak up. Our students come to us with lots of information and life experience, and bringing this to the foreground can give them confidence to communicate about this knowledge in English. This empowers students and hopefully establishes trust in the classroom. By providing a variety of classroom activities and presenting material through different kinds of media the amount of student participation will increase as various learner styles are being targeted.

When creating a thematic unit, it is necessary to consider not only activity variety but also the linguistic tools that are required to communicate about this topic. A successful lesson has a natural flow of activities that introduce and recycle new lexical items and structures in all skill areas, so that students feel confident about the words and forms they need to discuss a topic. Furthermore, students need opportunities to go beyond the form of the language and delve into appropriate usage. Variety is not just for variety’s sake, but has been proven to help students learn more than just lists of words but true control of the language. For example, when teaching new verbs, it is helpful to provide students with the appropriate prepositions that follow certain verbs or point out if a verb is transitive so that students know this verb always needs to be followed by a noun phrase. When teaching new nouns, it is useful to generate a list of common adjectives that precede these nouns. While native speakers understand the phrase “a high person or a high building” this is not native speaker usage, so students need to be taught that we say

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“tall person or a tall building” when referring to height. Therefore, I believe in teaching vocabulary in “chunks” rather than isolated words; providing students with these appropriate collocations will increase their ability to share their opinions with confidence.

In my opinion, fluency goes hand in hand with accuracy. Rambling on at length does not make a person proficient in a foreign language. Accuracy is just as important as fluency. Therefore, students need to be consistently given feedback in some form in order to learn to self-correct and become more accurate. Different types of activities, however, call for varied forms of error correction. In a guided classroom discussion, error correction can be immediate, but if a student is giving a presentation, it might be best to give feedback at the end so as not to interrupt the fluency of the activity.

Learning to be proficient in a second language takes effort on the part of the teacher and students. Teaching is an ongoing learning process and the longer I teach, the more I realize I can learn from my students as well as my colleagues. At this point in my career, I believe that creating a comfortable and non-threatening classroom environment, teaching appropriate usage of grammar and vocabulary, and providing consistent feedback is essential to teaching effectively.