

Approaches #4: Final Learning Paper

Teaching with Mindfulness

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Teaching with Mindfulness

One of the most important insights I gained from this course is captured in a quote I once saw on a door in the Sandanona building:

“In any language, in any classroom, anywhere in the world—it always comes down to the two of you: learner as teacher, teacher as learner.”

Teaching, for most of my life, had always been centered on the teacher rather than on the learner or the learning context. This view was shaped by my own experience as a student in a teacher-dominated system. Over the course of this class, however, my perception of teaching evolved toward one that recognizes both teacher and learner as equally vital to the educational process. *Approaches to Language Teaching (ALT)* gave me a deep understanding of how teaching works and what it entails. Through it, I discovered the interrelationship between teacher, student, and language—represented in the **I–Thou–It** triangle.

As a result of this course, I now believe that the totality of the teaching and learning experience is far too complex to be explained or guided by any single approach or theory. Each method I encountered contributed a unique dimension to what Larsen-Freeman calls “*the work of teaching*.” To make sense of these dimensions, I came to see **mindfulness** as the central concept—an anchor for both reflection and action in teaching.

In what follows, I elaborate on how my understanding of **mindfulness**, **the Believing and Doubting Game**, and **the teacher–learner–teaching context** has provided me with multiple perspectives and a more grounded vision of teaching and learning.

The Believing and Doubting Game

Another concept that has profoundly influenced me is the **Believing and Doubting Game**. This reflective exercise helped me navigate moments of skepticism and resistance to new ideas. Being mindful means allowing space to believe in an idea before rejecting it—to experiment, test, and reflect before passing judgment.

For example, when I was introduced to the **Participatory Approach**, my initial response was shaped by my Mauritanian educational background, where teachers are expected to avoid political discussions in class. I equated “teaching as a political act” with promoting specific ideologies, rather than empowering students to think critically about their realities. Through the *Believing Game*, I learned to reframe this perception. I began to see the Participatory Approach as a way to help learners become active participants in shaping their own social and linguistic worlds. This shift reminded me of Freire’s phrase, “*we make the road by walking it.*”

Mindfulness thus became both a compass and a corrective lens—helping me evaluate ideas critically while staying open to discovery.

Teacher–Learner–Teaching Context

Another key learning from this course is understanding teaching as an interplay between **teacher**, **learner**, **language**, and **context**. Each approach we studied revealed a new layer of this

interconnection. No method exists in isolation; its meaning emerges through the lens of these three dimensions.

I came to interpret the **I–Thou–It** triangle as follows:

The **I** represents the *teacher*—the initiator and reflector.

The **Thou** represents the *learner*—the participant and co-constructor.

The **It** represents the *language*—the shared object of inquiry and expression.

Surrounding the triangle is the **teaching context**, the environment that shapes and mediates every classroom decision.

Identifying the context in which a method works best is as crucial as understanding its principles.

As Larsen-Freeman notes, teaching is always a synthesis of *thought* and *action*. This understanding led me to see mindfulness not only as reflection but as informed practice—a way to connect awareness with concrete decisions in the classroom.

In essence, mindfulness gives teachers two essential tools:

1. **A believing attitude**—to experiment and explore before judging.
2. **A critical stance**—to examine one’s teaching through the lenses of teacher, learner, language, and context.

These tools, together, foster growth, humility, and purpose in the ever-evolving work of teaching.

Response

Dear Mohamed,

Thanks for this thoughtful reflection. The ideas that you focus on are such useful ones, I think, and they will serve you well. It feels like you have been able to burrow under the surface of the course to find the qualities that will enable you to learn and grow from any situation. Keep working with the idea of mindfulness. As you suggest, being mindful will make playing the believing game possible because it will help you see yourself when you are judging something. Being mindful will also hopefully enable you to develop the critical stance and ability to see and be open to exploring your own work and self (nonjudgmentally) in light of the multiple perspectives that you encounter.

It is wonderful to read the examples you give of how you made those shifts as you looked at each of the approaches. As you say, it became a shift not about rejecting or accepting an idea or technique but rather learning what you could from the encounter with something new. Bringing this attitude to your teaching will be so useful. As you work on the internship, keep paying attention to this idea. How do you work on these qualities of mindfulness and openness in yourself while teaching? (How) do you help students to work with them? To what extent do students need to learn mindfulness, believing game and about themselves through multiple perspectives in learning a language? How might you enable that to be an undercurrent in your classroom as it is in your own learning?

I love the quote that you found on the Sandanona Office door. It does all come down to remembering that!

Thanks. I enjoyed this. Good luck. I just heard from Tashi that you found a place to live a 20-minute walk from your school. It sounds like you are started on the internship journey. Have fun making the road by walking!

Leslie