

I promised to get this started by the end of the year, so here it is. Thanks to Steven for the title. I'm interested in everyone's thoughts and helpful questions.

**Random Thoughts, valid for the next four hours, without out-thinking myself
(AKA: My Philosophy of Learning and Teaching)**

Him: Why don't you give this presentation?

Me: I hate standing up in front of people!

*Him: But you're a **teacher**!*

Me: Teaching is the opposite of that. It's letting people stand up and do stuff in front of me.

That is as near as I can come to describing the seed of my philosophy of teaching and learning. As a teacher, it is my job to guide students to develop the skills they need to stand up in front of an audience (metaphorically, or actually) and *do something*. It is also my job to *mindfully* provide the support they need to succeed and help them unlock their reservoirs of motivation and confidence.

The question that remains is: how?

Here are some of my ideas and examples where I've tried to implement them.

1. By remembering that each student is a person on a learning journey. Not an age, a level, a class title, or any other label.

What does this mean?

Each person who steps into my classroom is an individual. It is my job to meet them where they are on any given day with no "shoulds" attached.

I have a student this year who is in a class of seven ten-year-olds. On his first day of class, he didn't speak at all. A few weeks of patience and predictable routine uncovered the key: song. He might not speak, but he sang. The first time he realized that everyone else in the class finished their writing practice much faster than him, he cried. After that, I staggered the activities so that it wouldn't be as obvious if someone needed more time. When his class started decoding words and reading very short stories, he struggled to keep up with their reading pace. He whispered and sometimes he didn't read at all. I made smaller reading groups so that I could listen to individual students. It turned out that he is quite a good reader. Just not fast. Meanwhile, some of the strong and confident-sounding readers turned out to be less accurate. Without the adjustments I made for this student, I'd have found that out too late. My student still doesn't speak above a whisper. His reading pace hasn't increased much. His writing practice still takes more time to complete than the other students. But he still sings with his whole heart (and dances, too) and most importantly, he plays and smiles and is comfortable in the class. And he never gives up.

Takeaway: Teaching and learning are about reaching the students as individuals and giving them chances to shine.

2. By spending the time to build a supportive class culture. Classes that go better are full of students who support each other as language learners and people.

Toddlers who play together in the park have more fun together in the classroom. The three and four-year-olds who hold hands in class don't need their moms to be in the room with them for as long. The nine-year-olds who sing for each others' birthdays also wait for each other to finish speaking. As a teacher, when there is a moment in class that feels like a "bonding moment" between the kids, I take advantage of it and try to enhance it. A class that comes together that way often progresses faster than a class that still worries about what their classmates think.

Takeaway: Kids learn better when they feel safe.

3. By having not too many specific goals and working with the students to achieve them. Working with the students is important because their buy-in is necessary and because it helps build group unity.

I had a class of students who needed to give speeches, but were very afraid. On the day of their speeches, we sat down together. I explained what our goal for the day was: a group speech. We talked about how we would get there in 50 minutes. We moved from step to step when they felt ready. And by the end of the process, three quarters of the students were ready to move one step further than we had planned and gave individual speeches. It worked because they bought it, because they were part of it, and because they understood the goals and were united in getting there.

Takeaway: Kids learn better when they understand the bigger picture.

4. By making it seem "fun".

Please let me define fun. By fun, I mean either a physical or mental challenge. Not an impossible challenge, but a challenge that is just manageable. Like getting through a level in Mario: you have to practice a lot and do it a lot of times - even the easy parts - but it feels really good when you manage to advance. And, crucially, the next time you play, it doesn't take so long to beat that level. (But, yeah, Princess Fluency is always in another castle.)

Activities that are fun because they have learning benefits: what's missing games, sentence or story scrambles, using all the flashcards for a unit to make a silly story, keyword games...

5. By presenting language in context through stories, songs, and creative play.

I strongly believe that learning is more effective when there is a context, and so I think that storytime is an important part of the class, that songs should be catchy and also contain language we can exploit, that kids can make their own silly combinations of words and experiment with language and make it theirs.

And that, I hope, goes some way towards explaining how I teach, why, and what I believe about teaching children and how they learn.

And I reserve the right to re-think every sentence and change my mind multiple times and even think more than one thing at the same time. :)