

Faith, Identity, and Pedagogy

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### Faith and Worldview

I believe that my Christian faith necessarily impacts the way I teach. As I strive to become more like Christ, the character of Christ is infused into my teaching through the work of the Holy Spirit in the form of traits like compassion, humility, patience, and dedication to excellence. Teaching becomes an expression of service as I follow the example of Christ who taught his disciples the meaning of true servanthood: “let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Luke 22:26, ESV).

One application of Christlike humility in the teaching context is refusing to hold tightly to prestige or status (whether in relationships with students or colleagues) and instead, being willing to place myself in the position of the learner. Snow (2001) paints a picture of how a ‘teacher as learner’ role might manifest in the EFL context: “by choosing to study the host language and culture, CETs dramatically change the nature of their relationship with the host community, and suggest in a powerful way that the people of the host country have just as much to teach as they do to learn” (p. 59). In an ESL setting, this could be applied to spending time learning from my students about their languages and home cultures, and providing time in class for students to “teach” something (e.g., talk about the city where they grew up, an aspect of their cultural identity, or a hobby they enjoy) that they know better than I do, allowing me to shift into the role of learner.

My faith inspires my involvement in professional activities through Christ’s example of selfless servanthood. Presenting at professional conferences is a way to serve my colleagues in the TESOL community that requires substantial sacrifice and offers little tangible reward. However, as I have challenged myself to present at conferences, I have discovered that I gain great joy from serving my fellow practitioners in this way, and I plan to continue presenting

regularly. Submitting articles for publication is another way to serve the TESOL community, and I recently submitted my first article to a peer reviewed journal, *MIDTESOL Journal*.

Additionally, I have been invited to help facilitate online discussions among teachers as part of the Community College and Adult Ed interest section of MIDTESOL. Although it might be easier and more comfortable to go about my own business, I believe that God is pleased when I share the insights I have gained with others in the field, and in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 10:31, I can offer this service to the glory of God.

### **Identity**

Identity is multifaceted and is not easily reduced to a simple description. One aspect of my identity that has influenced me profoundly as a teacher is my experience as a language learner. Donato (2016) has called for further research into the ways in which “teachers’ identity as past language learners. . . might connect to particular aspects of their teaching practice” (p. 29). In my case, the process of learning Spanish has been a formative part of my identity and has a great deal to do with the kind of teacher I am today. Not only was my language learning process an overwhelmingly positive one, but the fluency I achieved in Spanish allowed for a greater degree of cultural integration during my time in Latin America than otherwise would have been possible. To this day, there is a part of my identity that is inextricably linked to the Spanish language and Latin American culture.

Farrell (2016) claims that, “‘who I am is how I teach’; the person. . . cannot be separated from the craft” (p. 183). My experiences as both a language learner and someone who has lived outside my home culture have given me greater understanding and empathy for the experience of language learners in this country and have increased my desire to serve the needs of immigrants and refugees in this practical way. My experiences connecting with my Spanish-speaking

students in their L1 have led me to explore ways that Spanish can be used in helpful and appropriate ways in the English language classroom (López & González-Davies, 2016). My identity as someone who deeply values language and intercultural learning in my own life shapes my identity as a teacher who wants to help my students discover the doors that open when fluency in a second language is achieved.

Understanding my unique teaching identity helps me remember that I have a place in my professional field; I don't need to be cut from anyone else's mold to have a valuable contribution to make. Palmer (1997) claims, "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 2). Staying true to who I am and what motivates me will allow me to share confidently, genuinely, and without pretense with colleagues in my field.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

I believe that learning encompasses the whole person, and that the affective domain is a crucial component of successful language learning. Many learners struggle with affective barriers and need targeted strategies to help them manage anxiety, lower inhibition, and increase self-esteem and willingness to take risks (Arnold & Brown, 1999). As a language teacher, I believe it is my role to address these non-linguistic factors as a part of the language learning process, and to help my students overcome affective barriers to learning and growth.

I believe that language teaching should be focused on equipping students for real-life contexts. Classroom instruction should set learners up for success in the real world, "equipping our students with tools for generating unrehearsed language performance 'out there' when they leave the womb of our classrooms" (Brown, 2007, p. 45). By analyzing students' needs and

goals and designing course content that will prepare learners to carry out tasks that they will encounter in their daily lives, I can genuinely serve my learners and put their needs first.

I believe that using learners' L1 is an effective tool, both to enhance second language learning (Cook, 2001, Cummins, 2007, Carson & Kashihara, 2012) and to communicate esteem for learners' culture and language identity. Cenoz and Gorter (2013) have advocated "softer boundaries" between languages, "using plurilingualism as a resource and not as an obstacle" (p. 597). By speaking to students in their L1 whenever practical and helpful, I can communicate that I respect and value their home language, nationality, and cultural heritage.

My teaching philosophy influences my professional activities by focusing my attention on areas of interest for future research. I plan to read books and articles and conduct classroom research on the following topics in the coming months: affective strategies for language learners, task-based learning using real-world assignments, and effective practices for utilizing learners' L1 in the classroom. I plan to submit a proposal to present at the MIDTESOL conference and/or the TESOL international convention each year. Presenting at conferences will propel my research and learning and will continue to motivate and challenge me to investigate my areas of interest.

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