

## My Teaching Approach

Though I have taught ESL and EFL for over 12 years in diverse contexts ranging from community-based settings to university programs, my teaching approach is consistently based on the principles below. To illustrate I will explain how I shaped 2 very different classes based on this approach.

- Plan my instruction around the specific characteristics, needs and aspirations of my students.
- Contextual the instruction of English around relevant content.
- Engage my students in critical thinking, analysis and inquiry.

Last summer I was assigned a film class at the Summer English Language Studies Program at UC Berkeley Summer. Serving international university students - mostly Chinese, the program attracts students who want to both experience the US culture of the San Francisco Bay Area and also gain some preparation and experience from studying at a US university. Based on these common aspirations, I developed a class, [Immigrant and mult-cultural experiences through film](#), that I framed more as a university humanities course than as a traditional ESL class. Because of the large numbers of Chinese, I decided to organize half the class around Latin-American-experiences (an area I was sure the students would know very little) and the other half around Chinese-American experiences (still an unknown area, but one where they would have more familiarity). Furthermore, in order to focus the content on the Bay Area, 2 of the 4 films I selected were set in the Bay Area - La Mission and The Joy Luck Club. From there I identified the overlapping issues from the films that I wanted the students to explore – mutli-cultural/faceted identities (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, Chicano, Latino/gay), multi-cultural relationships, code switching, assimilation, gentrification). To provide my students context and other perspectives, I then researched and assigned sources from the Web that delve into these issues. I assessed understanding of the films and issues through quizzes and assessed their skill in analyzing ideas and issues through their class participation and an

academic journal that they kept. Fieldwork was an important feature of the class that connected the class closer to the Bay Area. Examples included 1) visiting Balmy Alley in the Mission District to choose, photograph and analyse in writing a mural that reflects an issue from class and 2) visiting the Chinese Historical Society in Chinatown to report on an exhibit that connects to an issue from class. In this way the class took on its unique shape based on these variables of students and context.

An [expository writing class that I taught at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences](#) (MCPHS) provides an example of how my development of a class took a radically different direction based on this same approach. This bridge ESL class, the first offered at MCPHS and composed primarily of Saudi students – most of them unprepared for the rigors of a US university and specifically for a university writing class – was intended to cover the same assignments as the regular content class that all students were required to take in the college. My first decision was to choose a completely different textbook than the other other expo instructors used. Instead of a textbook organized around cultural issues (a post-modern critique of Madonna for example), I researched and found a reader that was organized around controversial issues in the sciences. Though the readings still turned out to be very challenging for my students, they still required less cultural knowledge than a standard US cultural reader. Furthermore, the content had more validity for my students who were all pursuing degrees in the health sciences. By organizing the class around content that was more familiar to the students, I was able to focus more on developing my students' writing and readings skills. Furthermore, they were able to penetrate the readings a little further and engage in more analysis rather than get bogged down trying to understand issues that are rooted in experiences that they don't share. Unlike the film class where the content was a focal point for the learning, in this class I tried to frame the content as much as possible around the expertise of the students so that I could then focus my instruction on the skills my students absolutely needed to learn: self-correcting common ESL writing errors, organizing their writing and analyzing texts.