



ESL MiniConference

Ashley Green Motivated Students, Linguistic Knowledge, and Enthusiastic Teachers

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Ashley Green

1. What is your main ESL or second-language/multicultural activity now? What are your principal projects, and what is on the back burner?

Well, I'm always trying lots of different activities, but lately I've been very interested in incorporating different kinds of technology into my teaching. I started working with Camtasia, and I like its free, slightly less exciting sister product, Jing. I've created some how-to videos for my students that have been very successful so far. I did a series on how to write a research paper, and now I'm working on some more basic videos to introduce different activities I use in all my classes.

I'd like to do some actual research with my classes, but it's hard to get that started. One area I'm really interested in is motivation. I'd love to look at how motivation affects my students' ability in the classroom, and how I can motivate them more.

2. How did you start your ESL/SLA/linguistics/multicultural career?

Who influenced your decision? What were some important formative experiences in the early stages of your development?

I've known I wanted to teach for a long time, and I always assumed I'd teach a language since I've always been fascinated with languages. Unlike math or science, language always made sense to me. When I was in college, I studied abroad in Paris and I had the opportunity to teach English in a French high school. It was definitely one of the best experiences of my life, and it got me hooked on teaching English. When I came back from Paris, I worked in the writing center at my school, LSU, and I became the unofficial ESL writing tutor. I think the director and other professors involved in that program really saw my potential and encouraged it.

I got my Master's degree in Linguistics because I knew I'd enjoy it and I'd be able to teach with that degree. I'm so glad I got that degree because my understanding of SLA was, up until that point, entirely based on my experience. It was incredibly helpful to add a theoretical framework to what I already knew.

3. What are the four or five language/culture backgrounds with which you are most familiar as a teacher? Which ones are you familiar with from the perspective of a language learner yourself? What insights have you gained in how to meet the needs of learners from these cultures and language backgrounds?

Those are tough questions. I think I've had the most experience with Chinese, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, and French-speaking students. French is the only other language I speak. I've learned so much from all of my students that it's difficult to condense those insights into something useful here. But I will say that I have learned the importance of showing respect for and interest in students' cultures. I find that students respond better in my class when they see that I am genuinely interested in them and their culture. I try to encourage my students to show the same interest in American culture, and to recognize that our culture is just as diverse as theirs.

I believe that one of the most important things I can do for my students is to teach them how to function in an American university environment. We talk about disagreeing with people in a respectful way. You may not like the "American way" of doing things, and you can even express that frustration at times, but you have to do so respectfully.

4. If you had to give three pieces of advice to a new teacher, what would

they be?

I still feel like a new teacher myself, so maybe this is advice that I should take to

First, remember that your students need to practice their English; you don't. So don't dominate class discussions. Let them talk as much as possible. Become comfortable with silence. They'll learn to fill the silence.

Second, learn something about your students as people. Don't just learn about their cultures. Students like it when you remember that they play soccer on the weekends with their friends, or that Lady Gaga is their favorite singer.

Third, try new things in the classroom. I find that the longer I teach, the more cautious I become about bringing in new activities. I start thinking about everything that might go wrong. There's an enthusiasm that new teachers have that's contagious; you should take advantage of it and spread your excitement to other teachers. They'll be inspired.

Achievement Profile Interview by Robb Scott

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