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Current Issues in EFL/ESL
Syllabus - Spring 2025

Monday, March 3 is a national holiday.

Week 1; March 10
Issues
-Introductions to the course, the materials, and many other important things. In this first class, students' opinions on the range of different current issues in EFL are discussed in relation to local and more general contexts. A general discussion of the difference and relationship between issues and theories is discussed.

Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Write up a short reflection on issues as discussed and surveyed in the first class session.

Week 2; March 17
Best Practices
This week we discuss the idea of best practices in English language teaching and language learning, with the focus being on teaching. Best practices are deeply connected to issues with one overarching issue being the pursuit of best practices, that is finding the best ways to teach. The idea is that all stakeholders are trying to do their best and issues arise when this is not the perceived case. Thus, a quick review of best practices is a somewhat necessary precursor to the issues that are the focus of this course as those issues themselves have proposed best practices.

Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Write up a short reflection on best practices.

Week 3; March 24
Authenticity - Definitions and Scope
This week we go over some of the basic rationale, concerns and apects related to the general concept of authenticity in EFL. The idea of authenticity is grounded in CLT and was originally limited to input, but in recent years has expanded considerably both in its general definition as well as its scope. We will be moving though some of these different aspects in the coming weeks but will introduce these ideas this week to get a feel of the potential scope of the issue.

Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Bring in some materials to share in the class.

Week 4; March 31
Authenticity – Input
This week we review the issue of authenticity in the input the students are provided in the classroom and are asked to engage with outside of the classroom. The basic idea is that authentic input is the only type of input that students should be exposed to, but there are many accompanying issues. There has traditionally been reluctance on the part of language teachers and materials designers to make use of authentic input for a range of different reasons. This week we unpack authentic input in relation to type, sources, and features. We also expand the notion to all aspects of perception and not just reading and/or listening.

Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on the nature of authentic input. Bring in some tasks for practice.

Week 5; April 7

Authenticity – Output

This week we look at authenticity in relation to the types of tasks the students are asked to perform in and out of the classroom from two perspectives. The first and most basic idea of authenticity in tasks is having the students perform in ways that are congruent with those of the real world. This is an idea that changes what students are expected to do and also why. The second view is that task need to be congruent with goals linked to the real world of proficiency. In class we review elements of task design as well as lesson planning with the idea of authenticity as the central element.

  <u>Homework</u>: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on authentic tasks.

Week 6; April 14
Authenticity – Evaluation

There are many ways that authenticity is factored as a guide into the way that students are evaluated and assessed. The first of these follows up on the discussion of input and output from the previous weeks and centers on the design of tasks for assessment. Another way is to look at the way student participants are assessed and whether these assessments are grounded in the real-world reality of L2 performance.

  <u>Homework</u>: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on authentic asssments.

Week 7; April 21
Authenticity – Goals

The last main issue that is discussed in relation to authenticity is goals. The idea of the goals and objectives for our students are being authentic centers on grounding them to the real-world language forms and use and not making them overly pedagogical. The danger of relying on pedagogical goals is that they are grounded in practices or theories that might be invalid or developmental dead ends. This week we, therefore, focus attention on the very general idea of developing authentic goals and objectives for our students.

  <u>Homework</u>: Prepare for the review of authenticity.

Week 8; April 28
Review of Authenticity

In this review week, the students present what they have found and written up in relation to the issue of authenticity. Students will share what they have worked on over the last few weeks and do informal presentations that lead into discussion of their work.

  <u>Homework</u>: Look at the assigned readings. Take the two autonomy surveys. Write up a short reflection.

Week 9; May 5 (<mark>Holiday – class to be rescheduled</mark>)
Autonomy - Definitions and Scope

Starting this week, we turn our attention to the second of our main issues, that of autonomy. Autonomy has traditionally been studied from the perspective of the student and their actions as learners. In the basic introduction to the issue of student autonomy the rationales underlying this practice is introduced a6s well as the scope of the issue. More recently, attention has shifted to the teacher and the issue of teacher autonomy has corm to the forefront. We will briefly include this in our discussion of student autonomy.

  <u>Homework</u>: Look at the assigned readings. Write up a personal definition of autonomy.

Week 10; May 12
Autonomy – Goals
There are several ways of looking at goals/objectives in relation to autonomy. This week we are not only looking at the goals of autonomy, but predominantly at using goals as a way of developing and enhancing autonomy. The setting of goals and objectives is one of the key practices in establishing student autonomy. The basic idea is that students need to know where they are going and what they are trying to achieve. This week we review the best practices regarding this important aspect of teaching.
Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on goals.

Week 11; May 19
Autonomy – Strategies
Closely aligned with the idea of goals is that of strategies. The idea is kind of straightforward. For a learner to approach and achieve goals they need to make use of specific strategies. Research has shown that these strategies need to be overtly taught in order to raise awareness. The use of strategies enables students to do things and be successful on their own, which is the central issue in autonomy.
Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on strategies.

Week 12; May 26
Autonomy – Awareness
As briefly addressed in the previous week, awareness is one of the key aspects of learner autonomy. It should be mentioned that there is a certain degree of controversy surrounding this basic claim. On this view, a teacher, therefore, needs find different ways of helping learners be aware of themselves in the language learning process. This means awareness of the strategies they use, their own level and goals, and also their strengths and weaknesses.
Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on awareness.

Week 13; June 2
Autonomy – Evaluation
Another key tool in the arsenal for raising student autonomy is evaluation. Evaluation can take many different forms, from in class facilitative feedback to formal assessments but each of these needs to be used as a way of helping the learner understand themselves better so they can make decisions about their learning.
Homework: Look at the assigned readings. Reflect on assessment/evaluation.

Week 14; June 9
Autonomy – Technology
Technology is a crucial element in making learning more authentic, but it also plays a pivotal role in autonomy with the simple realization that most learning is going to happen outside the classroom. Technology enables the leaner to do more authentic practice in the class of course but is something especially important for learners when not in the class and working on their own. It also allows the teacher to be able to facilitate the learners through scaffolding and feedback beyond the classroom.
Homework: Prepare for the review of autonomy.

Week 15; June 16

Review of Autonomy

In this review week, the students present what they have found and written up in relation to the issue of autonomy. Students will share what they have worked on over the last few weeks and do informal presentations that lead into discussion of their work.

Homework: You have got to be kidding?