

Personalized Teaching: The Path to Real Communication

Rose Basoalto Cayul

rosebasoaltoc@gmail.com

Alumni Universidad Católica de Temuco

My journey as an English teacher has been profoundly influenced by my own early experiences as learner of the language myself. My first encounter with English occurred through a textbook I found on my cousin's desk: *Go for Chile*, published around 1995. I remember devouring the book, captivated not just by its cover but by the mystery of a language I did not understand at all. Another vivid memory is when one of my aunts showed me a world map and told me she had lived in France for many years and married a Frenchman. As a child, that story awakened something in me — a curiosity about languages, cultures, and the idea of connecting with people all around the globe.

Today, I firmly believe that every learner brings a unique and meaningful story when they walk into our classrooms. In our globalized, tech-saturated world — where even young children are exposed to English through screens — the language is no longer entirely foreign. Yet, after ten years of teaching, I often hear students say, “I don't speak English.” These words usually stem from misconceptions or past negative experiences, rather than a true lack of linguistic competence. And it's up to us not to let students get discouraged by their previous knowledge when learning a new language but after working in various educational contexts — especially since the pandemic — I have come to see teaching as a way to connect with people's stories, dreams, and goals. That realization led me to create personalized English courses, especially for beginners who want to express themselves confidently in the language.

A central component of my pedagogical approach is the use of an initial personalized interview. I ask them: Why do you want to learn English? What are your past experiences? How do you see yourself using the language? Who do you want to talk to? What topics

engage you the most? This initial encounter helps me to design a learning pathway that truly reflects who they are.

Over time, I noticed that even with engaging materials and dynamic lessons, learners struggled — not always with the language itself, but with how they perceived it. Their struggles were often emotional, rooted in self-doubt, fear, or comparison. It became clear that no matter their age, each student learns in their own way — and not just linguistically. They each require something different from me. But they all share one goal: the will to communicate.

For this reason, I continue to learn about and promote personalized teaching as a teacher-entrepreneur. I take time to observe how students communicate, how they respond to materials, and how their personalities shape their learning. I also offer choices — letting them pick tasks or topics that feel meaningful.

This journey has taught me one key lesson that I'd love to pass on: teaching is not just about methods or grammar. It's about seeing our students. Paying attention not just to their words, but listening to their stories, their tone, their posture, their past, and their dreams.

Therefore, I invite fellow educators to reflect on the following question: How do we facilitate this process for our learners?

A concise yet effective framework that guides my practice includes:

- Listening without judgment.
- Posing meaningful and reflective questions.
- Create a safe, welcoming space.
- React to what they say.
- Smile, encourage, and celebrate their progress.

When learners feel genuinely heard —rather than merely instructed— they start to express themselves. That's when real learning happens.

I encourage you to be a facilitator, not just a teacher. We may not have all the answers, but we might be the very person our student needs to feel seen, heard, and empowered to be themselves — in English.

We're not just called to be teachers. We're called to be models of meaningful communication.

But that, perhaps, is a topic for another reflection.