

Spotlight — Jagrati Chauhan



Jagrati Chauhan has 14 years of experience teaching at York University, and over 27 years of experience in language teaching and teacher training/mentoring. She holds a PhD in English and a Masters in Linguistics, and extensive experience in coordinating language programs, designing curricula, and assessing standardized tests. She has presented widely at conferences and webinars both locally and internationally. Jagrati's expertise in online instruction enhances her technology-enhanced pedagogies, enriching her practices to reflect cultural diversity.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Jagrati! For those that don't have the pleasure of knowing you, tell them a little about yourself.

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity, Nicola.

I bring over 14 years of experience teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at *York University English Language Institute, School of Continuing Studies*, along with more than 27 years in English Language Teaching (ELT) and teacher training/mentoring. I hold a PhD in English and a Masters in Linguistics and ELT. Some of

my teaching and research interests include content-based and skill-based academic English instruction, pragmatics, experiential learning, and evidence-based writing in EAP programs. I have presented on these topics at conferences and webinars both locally and internationally, sharing my insights through collaborative discussions.

My prior experience in online instruction and in instructional design have enriched my understanding of technology-enhanced pedagogies. This experience has enabled me to introduce diverse teaching and learning activities that resonate with the cultural diversity and richness that my students bring into the classrooms. My tutoring experience has equipped me with valuable skills in promoting differentiated instruction and in individual student counseling.

Additionally, I also have experience coordinating language programs, designing curricula, and assessing standardized tests as a certified Rater/Examiner for both IELTS & CELPIP. I have proactively enhanced pathway programs by streamlining courses and creating an inclusive learning module beneficial for both learners and instructors. To further refine my program management skills, I earned The ACE Certificate in Language Program Management with Distinction from *Mount Royal University* in Calgary. The program focused on the practical application of effective management strategies for language professionals.

In an AI dominated era, I aspire to motivate my students to incorporate elements of ethos into their work. It has



become convenient for students to get adequate help with writing and in most cases the spotlight is on grammatical correctness. Alongside the linguistic component, I want my students to consider other important aspects of writing that reflect their individuality, such as expressing their unique styles, voices and critical analyses.

At TOSCON24, you presented *Enhancing Creative and Emotional Expressions Through Role-Playing and Immersive Experiences*. Tell us about that.

Throughout my journey as an educator, I have witnessed how many English language learners struggle with authentic and creative self-expression. They are often held back by their overemphasis on linguistic accuracy. The rich nuances that bring language to life are often missed with little time in hand to devote towards enhancing creativity and emotional expression in classrooms. In current times when effective communication is more important than ever, I find our students prioritizing grammatical accuracy and technical standards over genuine human connection. I strongly believe that, in a diverse world that we live in, our classrooms are a cultural mosaic and in addition to learning the linguistic aspects of language, our students need to foster creativity and emotional expression to connect with and navigate the culturally diverse classrooms and university experiences.

To spark this creative enthusiasm, I have embraced structured role-playing scenarios and immersive experiences, like short dramas and experiential learning projects where learners develop self-confidence, deepen their cultural understanding and sensitivity, and learn to think creatively while navigating unfamiliar linguistic challenges through improvisation and making educated guesses using context clues. This helps in deepening cultural understanding and sensitivity among

learners creating a sense of belonging and significantly boosting engagement in the classroom. Students develop a profound appreciation for language learning as they begin to see language not just as a set of rules for crafting error-free complex sentences using advanced vocabulary, but as a vibrant medium for personal expression that truly reflects their individuality and emotions.

My presentation, aimed at intermediate and advanced learners in both virtual and in-person settings, showcasing an innovative scaffolded approach that encouraged spontaneous expression in a safe space. I also shared free CALL tools to help students digitalize their work and promote self-reflection. The worksheets scaffolded their learning and made the process engaging and interactive, while a comprehensive rubric allowed them to see their progress in real time. It was incredibly rewarding for my international students, to hold exemplars of their work, showcasing their journey of learning a new language in a new country. They beamed with joy and pride as they shared their achievements with friends and family back home. For students, this sense of accomplishment is truly empowering as it fuels their confidence and sparks a genuine excitement to continue their learning adventure!

Are you currently working on any new research projects you'd like to share?

After recently teaching a large group of trainee teachers, I have become deeply fascinated by teacher identity and beliefs. I have seen how our personal and professional identities shape not only our teaching practices but also our ability to embrace and celebrate diversity in the classroom. It is essential to see and understand how teachers' sense of self affects their interactions with students and their



responses to the diverse learning needs of the students. Creating inclusive environments where every student feels valued is empowering both for the students and the teachers. This encourages us to foster a classroom culture that truly promotes diversity and equity in learning by exploring the connections between identity, beliefs, and teaching methods. I am also interested in learning more about the changing role of teachers and teacher self care. I think these are important topics in the present times that need our attention.

I'm truly fascinated by the *Tree of Life* approach, which has its roots in narrative therapy—a psychological practice created by Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s. This approach was thoughtfully adapted for educational and therapeutic settings by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo and David Denborough in 2005 to address the emotional challenges faced by vulnerable communities, particularly focusing on children impacted by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. Recently, I had the opportunity to use this approach in my course for trainee teachers, and I was captivated by the outcome. It proved to be incredibly helpful in allowing these aspiring educators to reflect on their beliefs and identities in relation to teaching. This experience has sparked my interest in exploring the Tree of Life approach further within the field of education. I'm eager to learn more about how it can be instrumental in preparing trainee teachers to shape their teaching philosophies, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in the classroom. The potential for personal growth and resilience through storytelling is something I believe can profoundly impact future educators.

You have over 27 years in the ELT field. What keeps you motivated in the industry?

With over 27 years of experience in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), my primary motivation has

always been my students. It is the joy of watching my students learn, grow, and succeed that inspires me and deepens my passion for teaching. I find that students who arrive in class curious and engaged are a delight to teach. However, I also understand that not every student comes in with the same mindset. It is my responsibility to present the subject matter in a way that captivates and engages them, making learning relevant and enjoyable. While it is true that not every student will excel in every endeavor, this reality does not diminish my unwavering belief in their potential for success. The excitement of discovering each student's unique strengths fuels my enthusiasm, and every new class presents fresh challenges and opportunities for growth—for both my students and me. It is their journey of language learning, that inspire me to experience this rewarding role of an educator.

I also believe that my role as teacher is vital not only for the development of my students but for the society at large. Language teaching extends far beyond the curriculum and classroom walls as we prepare our students for life by igniting curiosity, creativity, and the passion for learning through collaboration and self expression.

The language teaching industry transcends beyond economic considerations; it embodies aesthetics, ethical values, and recognizes the strength in the transformative power of education. I am sure that many educators share this sentiment, which is part of what makes our work both challenging and incredibly rewarding at the same time.



**As a teacher you meet many students year after year.
What is something your students have taught you?**

Teaching is a dynamic process of continuous learning. As an educator, I aspire to remain an avid learner. Each day, my students teach me valuable lessons, prompting me to use different approaches and methods, and adapt my teaching style to meet their diverse needs. Their unique perspectives remind me to embrace new approaches that help in creating a safe and an effective and inclusive learning environment. Most importantly, my students have taught me the significance of patience—something I often find challenging, as I am always striving for immediate results. Yet, I have come to realize that sometimes it becomes important to step back and allow things to unfold naturally. It is in these moments of patience that we can truly appreciate the beauty and joy of learning and growth. Learning to be patient has enriched my teaching experience and deepened my connection with my students. It is a constant reminder that education is a shared journey of lifelong learning, self-discovery and professional development for my students and me.

***Thank you once again for your contribution,
Jagrati!***

If you would like to know more, please visit [Dr. Jagrati Chauhan's LinkedIn](#).

