Rhashida Hilliard
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Biography

Rhashida Hilliard holds a Ph.D. in International Education and Cross-Cultural Exchange and Training with a focus on South African Education in the post-apartheid era and an MA in Spanish and ESOL Education from New York University. She also received a BA in Spanish from Williams College and she has completed all but the thesis for the MA in Spanish at Brooklyn College. With over twenty years of experience in the field of education, she has been teaching Spanish and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to learners from various walks of life from middle to high school in both public and independent settings. In addition to working in education, she has worked at the public library and various not-for-profit organizations, which include but are not limited to Literacy Partners, Inc. and Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC). When she is not enjoying the company of family and friends, she spends her time running races, attending or conducting meetings, watching movies (regardless of the language), and/or learning new languages. Siyabonga (Thank you in isiZulu).
“Those who can do; those who can do more teach.” I first heard this quote from a burgeoning group of teachers in a graduate program at New York University. Not only was it a clever spin on the oft said, ‘those who can do, those who can’t teach,’ but it simply made sense. One surefire way to demonstrate true mastery of a topic is to teach it to someone else. Such has been the case for me from an early age.

As a youngster, I remember playing school (PlaySkool) with my siblings. As one of the youngest in my family, I naturally assumed the role of student, taking directives from my older siblings. However, it would not be too long until the roles reversed, and I became the teacher to my peers at my local public school in the Bronx, New York. That is to say that those of us in what was considered the honors class, had the unique privilege of tutoring our junior high school classmates who needed assistance in mathematics and English Language Arts. Thus, what started as a pastime became an unexpected paid internship to the tune of approximately $80 for the year! Upon graduating from junior high school, I continued to seek opportunities to tutor my peers in French or to volunteer at the nearby elementary school while fulfilling the requirements for my high school diploma at an elite boarding school in Connecticut. I was happy to be able to combine two of my passions: teaching and language learning. Moreover, when the prospect of studying abroad presented itself, I participated in an immersive French experience during my junior spring trimester, whereby I and about seventeen of my classmates lived with families in Paris and Pau, France for eight weeks while studying French language and culture. My wanderlust and love for languages (and learning, in general) continued to blossom, as I viewed the two as inextricably linked.

Once I started my college career, I enrolled in Spanish and Italian classes in addition to the other required courses. I continued to volunteer at the nearby elementary school through the America Reads program, and during my junior year of college, I studied in Spain and Puerto Rico, respectively. Upon graduation from college with a BA in Spanish, I would eventually go on to teach for the New York City Department of Education. After two years of teaching, I was fortunate enough to apply for and be selected to receive the Jonathan Levin full tuition remission scholarship for urban educators at New York University. After five years of teaching, I decided to take a leave of absence to pursue my doctoral studies full-time. While completing my doctoral degree, I worked at multiple not-for-profit organizations in New York while conducting research in South Africa during my breaks. Eventually, I returned to the New York Department of Education to teach Spanish full-time for an additional four years while writing my dissertation.

Ultimately, I successfully defended my dissertation entitled, 'Born Free' but Paying the Price: Is SES the New Black? A Case Study of the Construction of Equality Amongst South African Secondary School Learners. Currently, I teach Spanish to middle school learners at an independent school in the Bronx, New York. Besides finding ways to create engaging lessons for young adults, I enjoy presenting on topics related to intentional representation, meaningful integration of culture into language lessons, connections and comparisons between and within the Spanish-speaking communities, and addressing and combating antiblack racism in language learning. I am the proud recipient of a 2023 AATSP Conference Travel Stipend and the 2023 Fund for Teachers Fellowship to support my attendance at the 105th AATSP Annual Conference in Salamanca, Spain, and the Summer Seminars Abroad for Spanish Teachers in Panama City, Panama.