University of Virginia Star Talk Chinese Teacher Academy

Teaching Philosophy

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My goals as a Chinese language teacher are to foster my students’ awareness of Chinese language and culture and to help them gain communicative competence in a Chinese. To reach my goals, there are several principles that guide me to make pedagogical choices in my classroom.

My first teaching principle is that effective teaching should be student-centered with the consideration of individual needs. I grew up in a strict teacher-centered environment. I experienced firsthand the lack of motivation and passive learning. As a foreign language teacher, I believe that teaching should take into account students’ needs since motivation and attitude are important factors for students learning a foreign language. Teachers should provide communicative and collaborative activities in which students can construct their learning instead of merely receiving knowledge from teachers. With a student-centered approach, students can build their language skills through interactions with other students in a task and content base. As a teacher, I should engage each student in the learning process and be in the role of a facilitator rather than just a ‘transmitter’ of knowledge.

My second teaching principle is that a good teacher is constantly searching for effective teaching practices to help students conduct successful learning. There is no ‘one size fits all’ recipe for foreign language teaching. An effective Chinese teacher needs to be flexible, creative, and resourceful. It also requires the incorporation of new research findings from other second language studies. Thus, I always attend various professional training programs and conferences to learn from experienced teachers and receive updated study findings. From these workshops, I am able to improve my teaching and implement what I have learned in my class. For example, I started including the use of an online e-portfolio in my teaching in response to research that has shown it to be an engaging, reflection-provoking tool that facilitates collaboration for my students.

The third teaching principle is that I firmly believe that a good teacher needs to constantly reflect his/her own teaching. The best resource for reflection is my students. I also believe in building relationships with each student in my class. My students often comment that I “really care”, and they always share their feelings about the class and my teaching. I check with students about their understanding of new topics and ask for their feedback about the activities, their learning, and my teaching. The students’ input helps me mold my teaching techniques and activities to their needs in the class.

Another principle in my teaching is differentiated instruction. Teachers should not use a “cookie cutter” approach in which one mold fits all. Each student comes to the class with different experiences, learning styles, interests, preferences, and needs. A good teacher should consider these differences and provide various activities, curricula, and assessments to meet these different needs. I design different types of activities to help students with different learning
styles. I conduct individual meetings with students who need help. I schedule tutoring sessions with low-performing students, and I design accommodated assessments for students with special needs.

The last teaching principle is that motivation is key to ensure successful learning. A motivated student assumes responsibility and ownership for their own learning and goes beyond any requirements to pursue their own interests and goals inspired by the course. I established the e-Learning Projects that pair up my students with high school students in Taiwan. They communicate with each other privately through email and Facebook, and they also post comments on different topics monthly through our school’s platform. They also talk to their pen pals through Skype. Students are motivated and eager to learn since they love to meet someone from a different country and are able to practice the language they learn.

I find no other job more fulfilling and rewarding than teaching Chinese language and culture. By having students come to me and tell me that they have continued on to study Chinese in college and that they greatly appreciate my class despite all of the hard work, I know that I have been successful, which continues to fuel my passion for teaching.