

Language Teaching Philosophy

Eric Christensen

Language instruction is an indispensable function of education at all levels, from graduate university studies to primary and adult education in the community. It is easy to take one's own language for granted, but for those who seek to participate in a different language community—whether it be for immigration, professional, family, scholarly, or other reasons—language proficiency is a necessary prerequisite for opportunities, relationships, and knowledge that would not otherwise be available.

The core principles that reflect my approach to teaching and inform my classroom practices include: (1) establishing and maintaining a **positive learning environment**, (2) the centrality of learners' **intrinsic motivation and agency**, (3) **transparency** in course design and pedagogy, (4) **interaction** with other speakers, (5) **adaptability in the classroom**, (6) ongoing **teacher development**, and (7) a **foundation in linguistic research and theory**.

1. Positive learning environment

In order for students to participate in communicative practice in the classroom, they must first feel comfortable speaking in class. I accomplish this through positive classroom rapport, affirmation, and occasional “i-1” activities that are just beneath the learners' level and allow them to recognize the progress they have made and reinforce their confidence. I respect and trust my students and help them save face and take multiple attempts on particularly difficult tasks, assisting one-on-one as necessary. I am sensitive to individual students and make specific efforts to include and engage students who are more reticent or struggle to participate.

2. Intrinsic motivation and student agency

I recognize that the strongest motivation for learning another language is intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. Because students do not learn what the teacher teaches, but what they are ready to learn and willing to focus on, it is vital to keep students engaged in order for any learning to occur. I build students' motivation and engagement by encouraging them to set goals, self-regulate, and reflect on why they are learning the target language; incorporating authentic language in areas of interest to the students; and adapting my teaching to reflect the goals and feedback of students (balanced with the needs of the curriculum and program).

3. Transparency

For students to most effectively use the information presented by a teacher, they must understand the scope of what is being taught and why. I make students aware of the purpose of each lesson, how it connects to the curriculum at large, and why it is being taught. This transparency better enables

students to take charge of their learning, and it contributes to fair and accurate assessment, as students are aware of what they will be assessed on in advance and can study accordingly.

4. Interaction

The only way to build communicative skills is to practice communicative skills in real communicative situations; this requires interaction between students and speakers of the target language. No matter how good the teacher is, if students only listen to the teacher or perform exercises on paper, they will not be able to communicate orally with the language. Interaction is also vital in creating awareness of the target language culture and teaching proper behavior within that culture (sociocultural competence).

5. Adaptability in the classroom

I come prepared with a lesson plan, but I am not afraid to adapt my tasks, materials, and/or schedule to help my students meet the class objectives if my existing plan falls short (e.g., by adding additional practice if students do not understand or by extending to more difficult activities if the content is too easy). My lesson plans include contingency plans, and before teaching, I familiarize myself with online and print materials relevant to my course's outcomes that I can draw on as necessary.

6. Teacher development

Being a good teacher requires adaptation. Although some methods are more effective than others, there is no "secret sauce" method that works in all contexts and among all groups of students. I reflect on each teaching experience and identify what went well and where improvement is possible. I draw on research and other teachers' experience to continually develop my skills. When observed, I thoughtfully incorporate feedback from administrators.

7. Foundation in research and theory

My teaching is based in a knowledge of current linguistic research and theory. When appropriate (e.g., with highly literate adult learners), my grammar teaching introduces students to relevant metalanguage. My pronunciation instruction emphasizes suprasegmental features, as well as general speaking characteristics (e.g., volume and rate of speech), as the strongest contributors to comprehensibility. I familiarize myself with the typological characteristics of my students' first languages so I can tailor my grammar and pronunciation instruction to their needs, particularly when working with students one-on-one. Across all skills and dimensions of language, I make students aware of the standard, prestigious forms of the target language without deriding variant forms.