

Teaching Philosophy

Non-native teachers bring a unique perspective to the foreign language classroom (Larsen-Freeman, Anderson, 2011). As a volunteer nonnative teacher of Beginning Japanese language for many years, I enjoyed challenging primary and secondary education students, pushing them out of their L1 comfort zones. I recently started a nonprofit organization focused on foreign language and culture Seedtime Multilingual, Inc.. As an organizational priority, I advocate for foreign language acquisition and cultural awareness, targeting learners in rural communities and encouraging African American students to acquire a world language. Both demographics represent disproportionately low populations of language learners and teachers. My teaching philosophy builds on the value proposition that foreign language learners and culturally competent students are more informed about the world and able to participate as global citizens (Commission on Language Learning, 2017).

Teaching and Learning Experiences

While working in the public sector, I met two technical specialists visiting from Japan. They passed my office each morning without speaking. Likewise, I avoided eye contact with them. It seemed that the Japanese were most unfriendly. I wondered if they would speak to me if I could say hello in Japanese. A visit to our company's technical library, in search of anything that could help, proved to be worth the effort. I checked out a small book entitled *Say it in Japanese*. As I would learn much later, it is important to understand the difference between cultural sensitivity and stereotyping. Stereotyping is the result of "placing undue emphasis on exotic differences between societies," (Byram 1997 as cited in Torrijos, 2014). With each teaching opportunity, I aim to integrate language and culture in the classroom. This experience set in motion career aspirations for the teaching discipline and the desire to become a great teacher.

Without formal teaching knowledge, I imitated teaching methods and techniques espoused by my former Japanese professors to encourage the interaction of phantom (silent) and isolated (nonresponsive) students. With my current understanding of learners' interactional competence, I could encourage classroom interaction by introducing topics like tea ceremony, *Hinamatsuri*, Doll's Festival/Girls' Day, and *Tanabata*, also called the Star Festival. Additionally, I have become aware of my teacher action zone. Classroom interaction has a "considerable influence" on [student] learning (Ellis, 1985 cited by Richard & Lockhart, 1996).

In my first formal teaching role, an after-school and junior high school, program, I negotiated a contract with the school principal. I accepted 25 students, and by the end of the summer program, 17 students had completed the course. This exceeded my expectations and affirmed my decision to become a Japanese language teacher.

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Upon completion of the MAFLT program, I have progressed from strict use of textbooks to the use authentic materials, such as song lyrics, digital games, Japanese Manga, and Anime. I focus on learner proficiency goals that encourage meaningful learning in teaching strategies. These strategies are supported by theoretical concepts, learned through rigorous study in the graduate program. I set personal goals and believe in self-reflective practice, to become more effective as an early-stage teacher and program leader. Effective teaching will exceed a basic understanding of language teaching and has lasting implications for improving student learning outcomes.

During the summer 2021, I conducted Beginner Japanese language workshops, grades 3 – 10, hosting 140 students at five local community sites. Using the Marugoto Curriculum (Japan Foundation), students learn the first two writing systems and work from a themed-based curriculum. I am very supportive of focusing on receptive skills and decoding.

Additionally, I introduce learners to the concept of Can Do Statements (https://www.jpj.go.jp/e/urawa/e_rsrcs/seikatsu.html and [NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements | ACTFL](#)) and encouraged enrollment in Japanese as a Foreign Language, if taught at local schools or on-line. It is important to expose student to Japanese culture through pragmatic lessons in speech choice, teaching the levels of politeness, how to make requests and give excuses. These include the ideological concept of politeness, which have become a part of my standard teaching practice.

In teaching Japanese as a foreign language (JFL), this ideological issue is particularly relevant to the notions of Japanese language and culture, which usually seem to be taken for granted. (Matsumoto and Okamoto 2014).

Methods and Concept Approaches

Our nonprofit program is a community-based organization where learners can enroll in Japanese language course and receive support in reaching their learning goals. Like the standard language classroom, my focus is comprehensible input, where the learner is challenged slightly above their current level of ability. I accomplish this goal using corpus-driven data and digital tools; consider Hubbard (2008). Corpus tools, such as AntConc, and the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (Ninjal). These tools are useful in creating word chunks, sentence jumble, word frequency. Students of all ages can benefit for varying methods and teaching approaches.

Corpus-based content is useful in exposing learners to recurrent patterns in grammar. The point of corpus-driven data is to help me find “frequency of use” in words and phrases. Decoding is beneficial to learners; but I expect my students gain meaningful use of Japanese language, not simply rehearsing grammar and vocabulary.

Thanks to computer assisted language learning (CALL) technology that levels the playing field, allowing students access learning on-site and in remote (online) environments. Furthermore, with these methods and concepts for teaching, I am confident that I can provide

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better assessments and feedback. Feedback is no longer the last resort to communicating student strengths and weakness. Not only can I design more reliable assessments for novice-low and novice-intermediate proficiency students, I integrate assessments into the daily learning process Gonzales and Aliponga (2012).

Conclusion

As I improve my own linguistic abilities in Japanese, I intend to increase participation in teacher development through self-reflection in action research (Murphy, 2014). As an emerging teacher and leader, I will continue to learn from the perspectives and insights of more experienced teachers, education professionals. I stand firm that continuous learning through reading the academic literature, following developments of the MAFLT program and taking advantage of local and international communities of practice. Through these actions, I will join the ranks of highly-skilled language teaching and research professionals.

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