Teaching Philosophy Statement

(sample for a German language teacher)

As a language teacher, I have come to value communicative language teaching, and in particular, a balanced approach and practice of CLT to a classroom. I first learned foreign languages such as German and others with rather traditional teaching styles, and I would say that I learned those languages in spite of the teaching methodology, not because of them, due to my strong linguistic learning motivation. In fact, I learned more German and other languages outside the classroom, by living and traveling in foreign countries. These practical learning experiences have led me to appreciate experiential, practical and interactive means of learning and teaching. At the same time, I appreciate the value and utility of teaching grammar and pronunciation rules and patterns, be it through explicit or implicit instruction in these areas.

While some view CLT as opposed to specific instruction in these areas, I (and many others) view CLT as a broader framework that can accommodate a focus on language forms, such as specific instruction in grammar and phonology. This leads to a balanced mixture of instruction focusing on language forms, and interactive practice in the classroom. Just as I found the logical rules for German article and adjective declensions to be very helpful when I first learned German, I also teach such rules to students, who also find them to be invaluable shortcuts to learning what would otherwise take a long time to learn. Explicit instruction in these rules helps students learn quickly, and then we segway immediately into pair and small group practice activities, and then into more interactive activities that simulate real-life situations, where students can practice, learn from their errors, and improve. In the process, they gain interest in the language, and gain confidence.

The same holds true for implicit teaching of grammar rules, which are appropriate for a number of other structures in German, such as those that are analogous to the grammar of their first language. Students can gain a sense of confidence and mental engagement through grammatical discovery activities that lead into interactive activities. Pronunciation is taught rather deductively at first, but then after they have learned some vocabulary and grammar, we review some pronunciation points with inductive activities that focus on phoneme contrasts and accent. For higher level courses, there is less need for deductive teaching of grammar or pronunciation. The focus is more on the structure of academic German writing and vocabulary, where I primarily use interactive methods.

Such a balanced approach is one that I have found effective in dealing with the typical problems of students learning German – the complexity of the grammar and phonology, and the students’ lack of interest due to their preconceived notions and attitudes toward the language. Some have come into my classes disinterested at first, because their previous experience with language learning was with traditional, rule-based approaches, but by the end of the semester they have become engaged and interested in German, and have rediscovered the fun of language learning.
This balanced approach, along with my warm personality in the classroom, has been very effective in disarming my students’ qualms or lack of interest in German. I also engage regularly in action research, to test new methods of teaching particular units, by seeking feedback from students about the effectiveness of the experimental lessons. In fact, I have occasionally presented the results of my analyses at language pedagogy conferences, which have provided younger teachers ideas for their teaching.

I also seek to improve my teaching by having at least one lesson a semester in each course videotaped and analyzed by other teachers, or by seeking feedback on my videotaped lectures from teaching experts at the university’s teaching and learning center. At the end of the semester, I give students detailed feedback forms to fill out, from the university’s required course evaluations, and the students’ evaluations are very positive. I also conduct my own midterm feedback questionnaires, and make adjustments accordingly. I rely on all these above methods to check my teaching quality and to make improvements in my teaching. Most of all, I can see the results in my students, and how they continue to take an interest in German, and in European culture and society, after they have finished their courses with me.