

**MIN-MIN LIANG:** So my philosophy of teaching Chinese-- well it's a very interesting process because when I started, I knew one method. And I thought that was the best in the world, to do drill instruct-- drill the students all the time, make them repeat. But throughout the years, I realized they can say certain things, but they could not have a conversation. So they can do well on tests. It doesn't mean they can go and have a conversation.

So I think I've evolved, and right now I think the main philosophy for me is to have a welcoming environment to help students to speak the language, not to talk about the language. So that's my current philosophical idea. So everything I do is to carry this out and create an environment for this philosophy.

So I did a lot right for the past few years. I started changing, and I did a lot-- they said scaffolding instructions and very student-centered instruction. I used to be very teacher-centered. Which is very efficient. Don't get me wrong. It's a very effective tool. You kept the students on their toes. They have to [INAUDIBLE] right away.

And I got this evaluation one year. And they said, oh, the teacher is incredible. She was so good, but I wish I can learn how to speak. I was like, what does that mean? And you spoke well. And I realized he was doing the drill pattern. He can say a certain sentence when I asked him to say and repeat after me. But have him to have a natural conversation was really difficult.

So that dawned on me. I start changing. And I try to attend conference and workshop, not related to just teaching Chinese. More like how to educate people. More education and how to create an environment for all students to feel safe. So I adapt those philosophies in my course, too. So my philosophy is a welcoming environment. That means building a community for students to feel very safe to speak the language in this community. They're not afraid to make mistakes. And they'll always volunteer their opinions. That's my goal. The first step.

As I said, my philosophy is to create a welcoming environment, to build a community. So for example, recently-- two years ago-- I went to a workshop called Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom is geared to K through 12. It's more treating the younger kids-- try to get rid of the behavior issue. I don't need to do that in my classroom. But I think the strategy of theirs actually works.

First thing they do is building community. So for example, I do the first week of my course-- and these are hard to learn. They already know how to speak. But they are so embarrassed with them because they would tell me, my pronunciation bad. I don't speak to anybody else, only to my parents. I don't want to speak in the classroom. So basically, I do the greeting. The very easy things they're comfortable with. For instance, they talk about their name, what their major, they can all speak these in Chinese.

So what I do is the first day like that. And then start it-- I build into a routine. So every class I spend five to 10 minutes every day-- we call greet-- every class, not every day. We don't have a everyday class-- called greeting.

Basically I ask everybody to write their name on the card. So I collect the card. I put the card in the middle of the classroom. I would start because I need to model what it means. So I will pick up a student's card. For instance, I say, oh, Sarah Ling. OK and I call her in her Chinese name.

And I would start saying, how are you today? What did you do last night? Stuff like that. Daily life things. And then I ask a student, did you see what I did? So follow my model, and come here, pick up a card, greet your classmates.

So every day I would do this. I think after two weeks, everybody knows everybody's name. And while greeting this is not just simple greeting because you have a natural conversation when you say oh, I went to bed really late last night. And people would say, why? So I started very structured, for instance, just everybody just say very limited things.

And then I would say, OK, so Sarah says she went to bed really late last night. Do you guys want to know why? All in Chinese, so they would start asking. So I build on that difficulty. The Monday class is really fun. They love it because you can talk about weekend. So kids here, they did all kinds of activity during the weekend. So they're so interested in finding out what their classmate did because they might not know each other.

Some took classes together. So they would [INAUDIBLE] same course together in the classroom. Many teachers probably think it's a waste of time. Why are you talking about that? But I think through this, you build a community. So the moment they walk into the classroom, after one month, they could have a test before the top Chinese class.

The moment they walk into-- because of these greeting rituals, they have to switch their gear

into speaking Chinese right away. And because you're having a conversation, so you really need to engage your classmates. So that's what I mean building a community. They feel so freely. Can talk about anything they could. And they don't know the words, they will ask me, how do you say this? This is what I'm doing right now. It's really blah, blah, blah. And people really want to find out.

And I add another component after a few weeks is to-- by the time now, they already know each other's name. Every lesson, I ask them to write an essay. I give them a topic to write an essay. So I will ask them, for instance, I'll say, we talk about family. So our topic is Chinese family. So I wanted them to go home to write about maybe Italian family or Spanish family. So the structure. Model on the textbook.

So nobody knows what other students are writing about. So this time we call sharing. So this sharing part is to talk about what did you write. So some students, oh, I wrote about Spanish family. And I said, what was that? Tell us not just the title. What was the content about?

So they talk about-- everybody has a chance to talk about quickly. And then I said, oh, this is very interesting. So student will automatically, naturally, just ask, why did you pick this topic? Did you know any Spanish people? So the natural conversation just flows.

So they get into a routine. So every time they come to my classroom, they know they should speak Chinese. And they should talk about their life. And that's what they're good at. They cannot talk about politics. They cannot talk about history. But they can talk about themselves. And so to make the oral proficiency higher, and they can speak much better.

I remember there's one student after the Thanksgiving-- she came back. She was so excited. She said oh, [INAUDIBLE] that's how they address me as teacher-- and said, you know, I my father had this friend. And I always call him Uncle. He is from China. He doesn't speak any English.

So I met him in New York when it was September. I cannot communicate with him at all. So during the Thanksgiving, my home is so far away, so I went to my uncle's place. And I can talk to him. And he kept saying that my Chinese improved. And she said, oh my god, it's only two months. I can't believe I can speak the most Chinese. Even though I speak Chinese with my parents, I can never speak to anybody.

And she just came back so excited. And I feel great. So I know it worked. Because to her it's

talking, speaking in Chinese doesn't have to be something she has to think about-- how do I come up with the first sentence-- anymore because she does that in our class every time. So it's very natural for her. And plus, she actually knows Chinese because of her background. So she crossed the barrier to be able to speak to other people, which is fantastic.