My teaching philosophy is inspired by two great philosophers and educators: Confucius and Socrates. Confucius said, “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” Socrates was a pioneer in advocating the development of the individual. Applying the ideas of the two great minds, I characterize my teaching as being learner-centered. Another main feature of my teaching is that it is informed by research, thanks to the advantage I have as a language learning researcher.

I operationalize the concept of learner-centered classes in my teaching in several ways. In language classes, I create task-based activities that require students to use language in authentic communicative activities rather than ask them to engage in mechanical drills removed from context. For instance, I found that intermediate level students in my Chinese class had a hard time remembering most of the colloquial vocabulary and collocations in Chinese, no matter how explicit my explanation is. I thus invited native speakers of Chinese to our weekly lab sessions to engage in dyadic conversations with my Americans students for one hour discussion on given topics with the target vocabulary. With the help of educational technology, their conversation during the lab sessions would be recorded and became available to everyone in the class. My students were then assigned the homework to transcribe and examine the interaction data and identify episodes of native speakers’ use of the target vocabulary, a major task of the activity. I believe one of the main goals of any language class is communication, thus, engaging students in communicative activities, in which they collaborate in the target language and build a positive, interactive learning environment, is paramount.

I also believe that a learner-centered class means that students’ needs and individual differences are addressed and students’ critical thinking is fostered. Taking these points into account, I regularly ask for my students’ feedback on the activities, the class, and my teaching, and I arrange individual meetings with students. Instead of making students mere recipients of information, I encourage them to discuss, question, and relate class materials to their personal experiences and previous knowledge. I feel that my efforts paid off when students kept giving positive evaluations on my teaching. Aside from making the learner play a major role in class, I take advantage of my identity as a native-speaker of Chinese, a life-long learner of foreign languages (English, German and Japanese), a researcher, and a language educator by integrating personal experience and research findings into my teaching. For instance, a study I conducted on computer-mediated communication (CMC) suggested that CMC worked better for intermediate level learners while both CMC and face-to-face communication worked equally well for high-proficiency learners. I then started to apply CMC technology to my intermediate level classes, and this was well received.

I find teaching to be the most exciting profession that there is because of the challenges it presents and the demands it has for continuous change. The development of teaching skills is an evolving process. As I grow as a teacher, I expect there will be constant adjustments to my teaching style and philosophy. But one thing will always remain the same — my passion and desire to maintain a high-quality, engaging, conversation-filled, student-centered classroom.