Sabancı University School of Languages (SL) Teaching Principles

In the SL learners' personal intellectual growth is as important as their language and skills development. Therefore, in addition to helping them develop their language proficiency and academic skills, the SL helps learners expand their knowledge of the world both past and present and to identify various relationships between events through the use of a content-based and thematic approach. The SL views language as communication and believes in an integrated approach to the teaching of language and academic skills rather than teaching them separately and in isolation. The learner is at the heart of instruction with approaches and techniques built around learner-centred teaching and more importantly, on principles that view learners as individuals with vast potential and a rich repertoire of learning styles and strategies, which learners may or may not be aware of. Therefore, along with language and academic skills work, the SL strives to raise learners' awareness of their own learning and of themselves as learners, helping them to realize their potential more fully (*The SL Way, 2019*).

The SL is a research-oriented school regularly engaging in a variety of institutional research studies to achieve greater effectiveness in its academic and professional practices. Based on a collaborative and inclusive research approach to data collection and data analysis with its instructors and students, the SL published its Lifelong Learning (LLL) statements and Ethos statements in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, respectively:

http://sllll.weebly.com/

https://allaboutppdsl.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/slethos-april2017.pdf

Following these two key developments, in Spring 2018, the SL launched another major research study involving all its instructors in an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, perceptions and beliefs on teaching principles. The goal was to explore and draw up SL's teaching principles by addressing the research question, "*What are SL's key teaching principles as perceived by SL instructors?*"

The SL Teaching Principles Research Study was based on an online qualitative survey consisting of eight open-ended questions and administered to SL teachers. The study was carried out at a steady pace over a fifteen month period through a total of eight workshops where instructors collaboratively analysed and coded data; discussed their analyses for greater reliability; wrote up and revised principles; engaged in reverse data analysis; and gave feedback to each other on the work carried out. This extremely valuable process led to the development of the following institutional level teaching principles.

Teachers in the SL believe in the following principles in teaching.

Learning environment
    a.   learners and teachers having mutual trust, respect, patience, empathy and understanding
    b.   learners and teachers giving each other a safe space to enjoy learning
    c.   learners thriving in a comfortable and cooperative environment in which their affective needs are met
    d.   learners developing autonomy gradually in a supportive environment where they are encouraged to take initiative in their own learning, to explore opportunities and to take risks

Teacher motivation and attitudes
    a.   developing awareness of one's own personal and professional needs
    b.   pursuing lifelong personal and professional growth by exploring developmental opportunities; selecting learning processes; prioritising learning goals and acting on these in order to develop new knowledge and skills
    c.   reflecting on our persona as individuals and teachers in the light of feedback from our learners and colleagues
    d.   maintaining the shared goals and practices within a team while acknowledging one's need for individual space
    e.   maintaining effective relationships with learners and colleagues based on mutual respect, empathy and professionalism
    f.   recognising learners and colleagues as individuals with their own unique potential, needs, interests, preferences and ways of learning; fostering this awareness in others
    g.   being approachable and open in one's communication with learners and colleagues; being receptive to different ideas, styles and approaches
    h.   having confidence and also humility
    i.   recognising the role of humour and fun in effective lesson management and in fostering learner engagement

Progress in learning
    a.   helping learners to set individualised, challenging and achievable learning goals based on their previous learning experience and on their current knowledge and skills
    b.   scaffolding learning success leading to achievement of learning goals currently outside the learners' comfort zones; withdrawing support gradually when no longer needed or to maintain personal challenge
    c.   being aware that the responsibility for progress in learning lies with both teachers and learners; helping learners recognise their progress and achievement
    d.   gathering and using knowledge about learners and their learning needs to create differentiated and appropriate learning opportunities
    e.   understanding the importance of mistakes as learning opportunities and exploiting them in teaching and for meaningful and constructive feedback
    f.   raising learners' awareness of the value of cooperation
    g.   emphasizing the why of learning to give learners a clear and meaningful purpose which reflects high yet achievable expectations related to learners' personal and academic needs, interests and goals

The lesson and beyond

a. involving learners actively in learning and teaching related decisions whenever possible
b. giving learners a choice wherever possible in terms of how they would like to work e.g. task type, work mode, topic, pace
c. increasing students' interest and motivation through challenging, authentic, personalised and meaningful practice opportunities
d. helping learners transfer their knowledge and skills to real-life academic situations
e. designing lessons based on principled flexibility; acting upon spontaneous learning opportunities as they arise
f. devising rich and meaningful content to foster learners' curiosity and maintain their engagement in learning
g. designing learner centred tasks and exploiting them creatively

SL Teaching Principles are additionally supported by SL Criteria for Effective Teaching which act as a guide and a reference for both analytical and all-encompassing reflection, discussion and feedback on teaching both at an individual level (*i.e. through self-observation and reflection*) and at a shared level (*i.e. peer observation, formal observation, three-way observation, team teaching, learner observation*): https://allaboutppdsl.wordpress.com/criteria-for-effective-teaching/ The SL also acknowledges the importance of capturing the uniqueness of each teacher's teaching philosophy through an exploration of their perceptions as exemplified through the sample metaphors below.

If my teaching were one of the 4 elements (air, water, fire, earth), it would be...
because…

- *Earth needs an orbit to turn around itself and the sun properly, so my orbit is my students and their needs to teach them properly and effectively.* (*İpek Sökmener*)
- *It grounds you, takes all your negative energy and leaves you positive and open for more new energy.* (*Dalince Çongara*)


- *It nurtures and nourishes. (Deniz Çiçekoğlu)*
- *It takes many forms, from stream to river to lake to sea, from ocean to pool; it sustains and supports us, but can be unpredictable.* (*Nick Ebden*)

- *It is dynamic and my teaching style changes depending on the wind. (Deniz Rodrigues)*
- *It is foundational but imperceptible; I try to be present without weighing too heavily. (Justin Jacobs)*

- *(Olympic flame) Even the most discouraging situations cannot put it out.*
- *Because it heats up and activates students. (Nuria Gelado Rodriguez)*
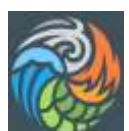
- *Air, water and earth must combine. They are the source of life together; fire is ingrained in any living being anyway.*
- *A mixture of all - at least, aiming at it - because that's where the balance occurs.*