

Christopher Born – Teaching Philosophy Statement

Throughout my postgraduate career, it has been my privilege to teach at various levels and in diverse circumstances. I have taught in teams, I have taught under the direct supervision of my mentors, I have taught online, and I have developed and taught my own courses independently. The courses that I have taught cover a broad spectrum, from introductory Japanese language to Japanese popular culture and literature. In all of my classes—regardless of level or student background—I have one golden rule, and that is: connect to students’ interests and expand their knowledge. Whatever their background or motivation, I seek to meet students where they are, and encourage them to go further.

In many instances, learning is contained in “silos” where disciplinary boundaries are clearly defined. But, outside of the classroom, we are required to bring all of our experiences to bear when trying to solve a problem. Appealing to students’ holistic contextual understanding allows for better engagement. Thus, I like to encourage my students to bring their backgrounds—the skillsets they have acquired in artistic, scientific or mathematical fields—into language and literature classes.

Since each student has different connections to and varying concepts about East Asia, various pedagogical strategies help deepen the knowledge of the invested students while drawing hesitant or reluctant learners into my domain of research and expertise. I find that some students are very interested in Japanese animation, and come to my popular culture courses with some basic knowledge about this topic. Others enroll in East Asian Civilization in order to fulfill a requirement. Some are interested in fashion or business, while others are curious about Asia, and are keen to learn a new language.

One key way I engage students is through effective use of audio-visual media. For instance, after assigning readings on the legacy of Confucianism, rather than droning on about cardinal relationships and displaying a slide crammed with text, I show electron-shell type maps of cardinal relationships, and then follow up with clips from Japanese animation, such as *Naruto* or *Bleach*. Afterwards, students compile a list of values and relationships they have seen expressed in the clips and write them on the blackboard and discuss their rationale. Through this kind of exercise, students are able to recall the specifics of the philosophy and see the durability of these ideals. Or, after assigning students to read a work of fiction for a modern Japanese literature seminar, I show animated adaptations of these stories and have students compare and contrast how the contemporary directors re-envision the original story and characters. This allows us to discuss the overall plot, story, narration, and character development in both versions. In this way, I can engage the attention of students who are excited about animation. Likewise, those who have a narrow interest in popular culture can discover the world of modern literature.

In larger lecture classes, I like to start off the class with a “Jeopardy” style slide showing a multiple-choice question that is not easy to guess, like the current birthrate of Japan, the crime rate in Incheon, or the GDP to debt ratio of China. Over the semester, students feel great satisfaction when they can more easily discern the answer based on their preparation. These questions make a great segue to the lecture topic. As each student has different strengths, I like to craft assignments and classroom exercises that allow students to shine where they are naturally gifted. I have seen that including online discussion components helped some students to express

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themselves freely; giving the students freedom to choose their own research topics helps students become more engaged in the writing process.

When teaching language courses, I am a strong proponent of the performed culture approach. I devise situations that elicit responses from students based on grammatical patterns, culturally appropriate expressions, and vocabulary that students have prepared in earlier lessons. Students are evaluated on accent, intonation, ability to generate a grammatically and contextually correct response, and the degree to which they can produce the materials they have prepared. This gives students the foundation they need to apply confidently the structures, patterns, and vocabulary they have learned in an unscripted, real situation—ideally in preparation for interacting with Japanese people in a natural, authentic way. Depending on the level and the content of the course, I also endeavor to select thought provoking Japanese texts that challenge students to read for understanding.

I am also careful of the fact that as human beings, our lived experiences, racial and gender identity, economic background, and abilities/disabilities inform our intellectual development. Having lived and studied abroad in Japan numerous times, I have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties of navigating a different sociocultural paradigm. I have also worked with students in an elite university and students at the local state university, and I know that the needs and concerns of both groups can differ greatly. Thus, I always seek to create a classroom where different talents, temperaments, lifestyles, and dispositions are welcomed.

In my teaching, I hope to highlight the commonalities between the United States and East Asia as well as create respect for the differences. My desire is for students to retain a sampling of the literature, philosophies, ethics, and cultural ideas discussed in class to sharpen their vision and increase cultural literacy. Ultimately, each student has his or her own pace, motivation, interests, and abilities. Through a combination of purposeful lectures, discussions, exercises and assignments, I strive to produce thoughtful learners who will benefit our global society. In sum, I try to model excitement for learning new things while building interdisciplinary bridges. As I have deep interests in technology, music, cellular biology, and media production, I use these interests of mine to enhance the learning materials I bring into the classroom. Ascertaining student engagement and level of commitment allows me customize content and learning activities to a wide variety of learners and learning styles.