

Introduction to Language Teaching Programme 2016

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Last year I completed a Graduate Diploma in Teaching (Primary) and now I am a Year 8 Teacher in an innovative learning environment at St Thomas's School in Kohimarama. St Thomas's School is keen on incorporating languages into the curriculum. In previous years German was on offer, this year students throughout the school are learning Mandarin. I have found that there is never a dull moment in teaching; I love the challenge, satisfaction and fun of it. I am able to inspire students while bringing my own interests like languages, outdoor pursuits and reading into the curriculum.



I decided to start teaching a language because I am a people person, and part of that is learning languages as a means of communication. I have lived in Spain, Canada and Japan so I have had a lot of exposure to other languages. Learning and teaching Mandarin is a natural next learning step for me.

The Introduction to Language Teaching programme is basically in three stages. The first is a full day introductory workshop where teachers come up with their individual inquiry focus. The second stage is an afternoon workshop of sharing resources and ideas with each other. The third stage involves a workshop in which teachers present a brief overview of their inquiry journey. Throughout the process are opportunities to share and discuss with fellow teachers and advisors. The programme is manageable because the second workshop was only an hour and a half long and was held at my school so teachers in my area wouldn't have to travel far. As for the ongoing work - every now and then I update my portfolio with evidence of my learning journey. In terms of the Mandarin teaching, I have plenty of time to learn a small amount of content before teaching the weekly lessons.

The biggest highlight of teaching languages for me is the enthusiasm on my students' faces. They just love the buzzy vibe in the classroom as they take part in activities and chatter away in another language. The challenge for me is pronouncing words correctly. Luckily I have a few fluent Mandarin speakers in my class who I often call on for help.

My confidence is growing steadily through the Introduction stage, especially after my observation and feedback session in Term 2 with Karen, ILEP Teacher Development Advisor. I felt like I was blundering my way through the lessons and doing my students a disservice by not having extensive content knowledge. I now know that I can use this to my advantage to show solidarity with my students by openly being in the learning pit with them. I was reassured that I am doing a great job and emphasis was put on the teaching and learning being manageable for me and enjoyable for the students.

I picked up many activity ideas and resources that I can print and use like picture cards, Chinese characters and instructions which I can put up on the wall for my reference during class time. I have used a version of 'paper, scissors, rock' to teach my students numbers in Mandarin. They say together 'yi, er, san' then show any number of fingers between zero and five on one hand. The first person in the pair to say in Mandarin the total number of fingers shown is the winner. The students loved it. Once they had learnt numbers up to 20 they played the game with two hands.

I am gathering a lot of ideas and resources to use in class by sharing with other teachers on our Google platform and in workshops. The observation and subsequent feedback session with ILEP was fantastic because Karen observed my students as well as me, and catered her feedback to their needs.

I would recommend the ILEP Introduction to Language Teaching programme to other teachers. Learning and teaching a new language sounds daunting, but by being a part of this programme I am supported by language professionals and fellow course participants to succeed. Exchanging ideas, discussing obstacles, and receiving constructive feedback have been essential to my professional development. In the future I would love to use the knowledge I have gained through ILEP to teach Spanish. I speak Spanish already and having lived in Spain I am familiar with the culture.

I would advise future Introduction stage teachers to ask for help whenever you need it, bite off manageable chunks and keep it fun for yourself and your students!