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BYU CHINA TEACHERS TEACHING TIP

This teaching tip is one I received from many people before I actually came to China. Those who have gone before stressed the value of a native English speaker in the university classroom. Not only that, but as a BYU China Teacher, I could also offer the added value of teaching with the elevated purpose of sharing unconditional love as well as a feeling of goodness and happiness.

Every time I heard this message it was in the form of advice such as: “Don’t worry so much about what or how you teach. The most important thing you bring to the classroom is who you are and what the students feel when you are with them. Everything else will follow. The Lord will see to that. This is His work.”

That being said, the best moments in my classroom each day happened right before class began and the very first part of the class before my “official” teaching began.

I usually arrived early enough that I had time to go around the room and greet every student, calling them by name and sharing some kind of handshake: formal shake, high fives which occasionally included “sparkle”, down lows, side to side, etc. This included a brief tutorial of the new handshake with the first few students, but the rest of the class was closely paying attention and caught on quickly. They always seemed to be curious about what I might come up with next.

I always said their name with a BIG smile on my face and used different greetings as I worked my way around the room: “Hello, how are you?”, “How’s it going?”, “Good to see you!”, “Glad you’re here!”, “I missed you last time. Are you feeling better?”, etc. Over the course of the semester I have seen shy students turn into smiling friends who look me in the eye and return my greeting with confidence. Even if I had a day when I wasn’t feeling like my best self, this simple activity of turning my heart to my students before class began created a feeling of joy.

The other activity that became a great daily classroom tradition was that I put a positive or cultural phrase on the chalkboard before class began and asked each student to use that phrase when they stood and participated in roll call. I would look up from the roll as each student responded, make eye contact and give another HUGE smile. Sample phrases included: Happy to be here; It’s my lucky day; I’m better than ever; There’s no place I’d rather be; Seize the day; Awesome day, isn’t it; Let’s make it a great day; Hey, wadda ya say, Howdy (for my cowboy and mutton busting theme), etc.

Here's a sample of what students wrote in their end-of-semester course evaluations:

- “I have learnt many things. I know I should give a smile to others when we meet.”
- “I love your meaning of teaching: happy, relaxing and careful. From my perspective, you is the way to learn about America, and the best way.”
- “Teacher can remember everyone’s name and say hello to us. It let English class relaxed.”
- “The thing I liked most about this class is the special way of greeting and the smiling of teacher.”
- “The teacher taught me a lot. Not only the knowledge about English but also taught me the attitude towards life. She always say hello to everyone.”
- “I enjoy the happy atmosphere and my teacher with sweet smile.”
- “I enjoyed the class because teacher will greet us before the class. It’s great!”
- “I learned to smile and never let the blue mood around me and my face because teacher always show the smile to us and she infect me.”