



A Guide to Successfully Teaching ESL Lessons

Written by former teachers for future teachers.



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Your First ESL Lesson in China

Enjoy it

The most common question I get asked is 'can you give me some advice?'. The first thing I say to this is enjoy it. Before we get too technical, it's important to note that ESL teaching is about having fun. The kids in China will love meeting you, and it's amazing what you can learn from teaching them. You will be nervous, but that's normal. The likelihood is that you will have adrenaline on your side, however it doesn't matter if you don't have the perfect lesson, as it's just as much a learning experience for you as it is for the students.

What is important is that you reflect on your teaching and think what you can do better next time. Even the most experienced teachers have bad lessons. Just remember to be yourself and show kindness throughout your school as it goes a long way. Chinese people recognize that as an important quality of being a teacher.

It is also important for you to understand that every teacher is different. What might work for one teacher may not work for another. We should learn to respect that there are many ways you can teach and there aren't necessarily right or wrong ways (within reason). I encourage you to think big, take some educated risks and be as creative as you possibly can. The advice you will see in these documents is from five years teaching experience and from being formally invited to observe other teachers.



Greetings

Good morning class! A statement often used to begin a lesson. This may seem like a simple greeting; however, this can be really effective to ensure students understand the separation between break time and 上课 (shàng kè - to start lesson). Many teachers walk into the classroom and say their chosen greeting once without expecting a reply. This leads to some students not acknowledging class has started and therefore a lack of awareness from the get-go.

A simple but effective piece of advice is to clearly say 'good morning/afternoon' (or whatever you choose) and encourage the students to say it back to you. Nowadays most students in China have a basic understanding of English, so they should understand this and be able to reply back. It is unlikely that everyone will reply the first time, so it's a good idea to repeat. Repeat the greeting until all the students have replied to you so that you know you have all students' attention, and then it's now time to learn. This technique is widely recognized as making a big difference.

Be Firm but Fair – Rules

It is important, or some would say imperative, that you set the rules on the first day to set long-term boundaries. You hear teachers saying, 'I don't want to be a killjoy though' and the reality is, you are the teacher. Rules are expected to be enforced. The students will find fun in the fun activities but it's important they know when to stop. It's a balancing game, and students will respect you for that.

So how do you implement rules? For kindergarten and primary schools, there's a fantastic song with actions that the kids can do. Below are two videos, one led by a man and one by a woman:

Man - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQxK-Ah7has>

Woman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kii8Nr5UYpc>

Repeat the song twice at the beginning of the class and maybe a third time at the end. You can also repeat this in your next lesson as a warm up too, or every month to remind the students. Repeating is very important throughout all aspects of learning to reinforce standards and most importantly learning.

For middle to high school, there's also a video that you could use to explain the rules: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWXPCP8t00M>

Following this, show a PPT about rules, then encourage the kids to create a poster with all the rules they need. The best poster gets stuck up on the wall and is used as a reference for when the students break the rules.

One good idea I've seen is when teachers get all their kids to sign a poster with the rules on it to declare they have read and understood them. The particular one I watched was a teacher who made it into a scroll and acted out like it was treasure and pirates - very creative. This can potentially last all lesson and introductions may be shortened to only a warm up.

Planning Your First Lesson

It is highly likely that the school will want your main focus to be speaking; therefore, your activities have to reflect that. As mentioned above, engagement is important and is often the driving force of ESL teaching. As a result, your activities have to include everyone. Teachers often fall into the trap of choosing one student who always puts his/her hand up, such as Kevin, while Bubbles (yes, they do have interesting English names) is staring at the wall. Bubbles along with



his 35 other classmates who are not Kevin at that moment are bored.

Single hands up can't always be avoided but the message is, don't rely on it. You have to ask yourself the question, 'does my activity engage all students?' And 'how am I going to engage everyone?'. The best option is group or pair work. A simple idea is to have a picture on the board and ask, 'What can you see?'. Number the students one and two and give them two minutes to speak to their partner. This results in students speaking while you are listening and understanding their ability.

Encouraging Engagement

Student engagement is imperative for an effective learning environment. It benefits all aspects of the classroom, especially behaviour management. One major aspect of engagement is ensuring every child in the classroom is involved and therefore focused. This document will look at some key techniques you can use to address all students in the classroom, engaging them into effective learning. I recommend you read the previous document 'ESL Behaviour management in China' for techniques that will also help with engagement.

Interactive Attention Grabbers

An attention grabber is an activity or technique you can use to attract the attention of your students. Such techniques are often used at the start of the lesson to indicate it has begun, or more frequently during the lesson when you want the children to stop what they are doing. Standing there and repeating 'stop' simply won't cut it. To make this more effective, you must use interactive and simple techniques, such as saying 'ABC' and the children reply '123'. There are many variations of this, so use your imagination and see what you can come up with.

A great example that I observed was a teacher who said '123 eyes on me' and the children replied '456 eyes are fixed' in a rather rhythmic way. This was done with hand actions. It was interactive, fun and provoked a response from the whole class.



One of my personal favourites is the hand clap. Clap in any rhythm you want and get the children to clap the same rhythm. They have to stop and listen for it. Keep repeating this until all the students are doing it, whilst praising the children who are keeping up in time.

Planning

Plan plan plan. Start your plan by setting a learning outcome. It is important to set direction for your lesson in order to reach your desired outcome. Planning also helps you prepare good activities suited to your chosen subject, which helps engage students and demonstrates to them that that you are knowledgeable and a good leader.

Let's assume your objective is for students to learn all 7 continents of the world. A person who hasn't planned would probably base their knowledge on their own experience, which may not cover all 7 continents. I say this because I watched a teacher get confused by

Australia and Oceania. Once they ran out of ideas, they deviated from the objective, leaving the class confused and disengaged. This goes to show how important it is to know your stuff. Being prepared and showing that you're knowledgeable is an important part of your role, and your students will respond to this. Planning, reading and scrolling through the internet can bring up an array of useful resources. It gives you time to organise your lesson, create interactive group work activities and engage all students. For example, printing out the continents and getting the students to create the world map from memory can be a great team exercise.

Planning can also extend your knowledge further. You may learn what animals, food, places that these continents share that you did not know before and can incorporate it into your lesson. This would help not only meet the learning objective of the 7 continents but exceed it. It can also set you up for a follow up lesson, making the topic more detailed and teaching the students even more. Deeper learning arouses curiosity which can lead to engagement.

Get to Know What is Cool

Children believe that adults are too old for 'cool things' like Minecraft. Simply mentioning the word Minecraft will make the students jaw drop to the floor. Minecraft is currently very popular in China. For those who don't know it, it's a computer game where you build things from pixelated cubes. Personally, I've never played but I know exactly who the characters Alex, Steve, Creeper, Blaze and Skeleton are. Why? Because, not only are children engaged by trends, but knowing more about the trend can extend conversations further. This can be enough to gain respect from the students, showing you understand them better, which they will respond to.

Minecraft is just one example which will soon be out of fashion, therefore it is important to keep up with the trends. See what's on at the movies currently or update yourself on music the students like. Also learn some slang. Students will find it funny if you use it. 'Liu, liu' is 'six, six, six' in Chinese and means 'great'. 'Spicy chicken' means rubbish. Use them when you can to have a bit of fun.

It is also worth mentioning that Mr. Bean is very popular with kids. It's great because everyone can understand it and you'll be surprised that there is a Mr. Bean video for a lot of topics. Use a Mr. Bean episode as either a reward or to ask questions, getting the children to describe what happened.

Assessment

Assessment is all about finding out whether the students understand what they have learnt and giving feedback where needed. Studies conclude assessment to be a motivating factor that can help engage children in the short and long term. This is because you are giving them praise and reward which the children strive for, but also giving them critique into how they can improve. Both of which are engaging factors.

However, assessment can be limiting in an ESL environment because of the vast number of students. For example, marking work is important, but with 1000 pieces of work a week, it is not reasonable for an ESL teacher. As a result, getting to know individual abilities can be difficult. On the other hand, it is likely that an ESL teacher will focus on speaking, which eliminates the need for marking. Although this still has its limitations, there are techniques you can use to implement assessment into your planning.

There are two types of assessment; formative and summative. Formative is ongoing feedback whereas summative is the likes of exams at the end of the year. Formative is arguably the most effective in an ESL environment as it can be done throughout class by asking questions surrounding what you taught. If the students' answers are of a good standard, then rewards should be given, and you should tell them why they did well. You can then explain how they could improve their sentence to improve learning. If they did not do well, you can then address any misunderstandings. The idea of scaffolding and seeing where the children are at and deciding how they can improve is good for informing planning and motivating to keep students engaged.



There are studies that suggest summative assessment is less engaging than formative. However, in China, exams are seen as extremely important and a key indication of students' abilities. There are limited studies on this but from my experience, letting the students know that you are going to have an exam is often enough of a reason for the students to engage. In China there is a real fear of getting a low score. You may want to consider having an end of term exam if you feel it is needed. You could also do regular pop quizzes as a form of assessment and make it fun to keep it engaging. Although summative assessment may be useful in China, I would agree with studies that formative assessment is more effective however I would not rule out summative assessment.

Provide Choice

We can't expect students to be fully independent, but by giving them the chance to make their own choices during the lesson is very engaging. PowerPoint presentations are great a way to encourage interaction and give students the chance to choose options. Examples include; students choosing a picture and describing what they can see, choosing the colour of the sticker they would like, or what video they want to watch as a reward. You could even think big and encourage the children to choose a project based on the things you have learnt together. There are many opportunities for choice. Have a think of what choices you could implement in your classroom to help engage the children.

Use Technology

Schools buy equipment to encourage interactive learning. Technology is in everyday society, and children love it. Therefore, you should use it to enhance engagement. Nearly every classroom in China these days have an interactive whiteboard, connecting to the computer. It is expected that you use a PowerPoint because PowerPoints can give good quality aesthetics that are important for visual learning. You can use animation on PowerPoint presentations that the children will respond well to. Linking to the idea of choice, children love being able to press buttons. Get the children up to choose a button on the screen and use animations to make it visual – enabling the students to delve into their imagination.

Extra Resources

Twinkl has some fantastic interactive PowerPoints that encourage the use of technology and choice. Although it comes at a cost, the quality is worth it. Check it out at, www.twinkl.com.

TES is also a good free website with some good PPT's and worksheets. Be careful though as some are better than others, and it may be best to edit them or just use them for ideas.

Independent Activity

Here is a blank, basic template of a lesson plan from the popular website TES.

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/lesson-plan-blank-templates-6180872#>

This simple plan will help guide you through some of the main concepts of planning. The right-hand column also gives you the opportunity to evaluate assessment of the lesson. Create an engaging lesson plan using the template and include **interactive attention grabbers, something 'cool', assessment techniques, choices and technology**. Start getting into the habit of creating an engaging routine and see how creative you can be.

Using Differentiation in Your Lessons

It is evident across all aspects of education that children range in ability and often vary subject to subject. In ESL lessons in China, the contrast from lower to higher ability in one class can be significant. Some children are almost fluent while their classmates understand little to no English. The Chinese school environment has many limitations when it comes to addressing higher and lower abilities. This document is going to explore those limitations and help you understand how you can work around them to produce an effective learning outcome for all.

Grade Organisation

All students in China, from primary to high school are assigned a class where they will stay for the remainder of their school time. Grade organisation can differ from school to school, though it is likely that students are grouped together based on ability. You're likely to be able to identify the lower and higher ability classes, however this is rarely talked about it due to the school culture of pleasing parents. One particular way Chinese schools differentiate their children is by talent. For example, they believe that a student who is good at playing the piano is likely to have the discipline to study hard. This goes for all talents relating to sports, arts etc. Although it may be likely that these children are of a higher ability in certain subject areas, a child who plays piano well may not take well to academic concepts and is perhaps more of a practical person. Therefore, even in a higher ability class, it is likely that there will be children of a lower ability when it comes to certain things. The opposite also applies; those perceived as lower ability may actually be very good at languages, causing a substantial mix of abilities in each class.

Class Organisation

In many western schools, it's the teacher who stays in the classroom. In China, the students remain in the classroom and subject teachers come in depending on the lesson. Therefore, there is little room for flexibility in arrangement of the class, causing many limitations to differentiation. Teachers would argue that having the classroom organised in high, middle and low ability is a good way to differentiate in order for effective learning. This cannot be done when you have over 20 classes a week in 20 different classrooms and sometimes over one thousand students a week. However, some studies do suggest mixing abilities can help the lower abilities learn and help higher abilities gain skills in leadership. Going by that we can begin to understand how we can use the strengths of students to create a differentiated class.

Class Monitor

Every class has a class monitor/class leader. Some are better than others, however you can use this person not only to report behaviour issues to their class teacher, but to help you identify which students are of higher and lower ability. They can help you create a

register which will help you know the names of the students. It is unlikely you will learn all the names but trying to place names to a face regularly can help you get to know children individually, allowing an understanding of character and how they may have progressed throughout the year.

The class monitor can also help you get know each person in the class. This includes knowing whether they can speak good English, whether they are good at math's or may have had some issues in school or at home. From this information you can adapt your lessons for differentiation and inclusion. For example, the class monitor says that a group of children in the class won a spelling competition. As a result, you are able to get the children to spell the vocabulary instead of saying it and encourage these children to help those who have struggled. Another example includes the monitor telling you about an autistic child who responds well to praise. Although praise is something you should give all the time, this ensures you always plan a good reward system. Ultimately you can use the class monitor for whatever purpose you see fit, providing it will benefit the classroom.

Planning Activities for All Abilities

To begin with, you should always have a learning objective in mind that is accessible to all. For example, 'to learn 10 animals in a farm'. All abilities should be able to do this with pictures, songs and any other means that you see fit. This would mean that by the end of the lesson, the lower ability students have achieved the learning objective, but it may be too easy for higher abilities. As a result, you should plan additional activities that go beyond the learning objective. An example would be to ask the children to **create a sentence** using 3 of the 10 farm animals. Another would be to ask what they eat, and where they sleep. The lower ability students are still hearing the vocabulary farm animals, while the higher ability students are expanding their learning, helping the lower abilities on the way.

Ultimately, you want variety. Children learn in different ways, whether it be visual, auditory or kinesthetic. Examples include:

- creating a poster,
- drawing a comic using the vocabulary,
- listening and understanding music,
- recreating a music video,
- saying what you see,
- playing games,
- designing a logo
- playing a sport outside

Group work is good for mixing abilities, and you should always plan pair or group work for peer assessment (learning through your classmates).

Use your Teaching Assistant

In some cases, you will have a Teaching Assistant (TA) and if you are kind and friendly, you will build up a good relationship, even if they don't speak good English (use the class

monitor to translate if needed). Ask questions about the class and get to know important information that will help you with your planning. You can always kindly ask the TA to help higher or lower ability students if they need extra attention. However, this is not guaranteed as TA's in China are often just there to assist if there is an emergency, unlike western TA's who assist with learning.

Extra Resources

It's important to read up on teaching topics. Differentiation is something ESL teachers don't necessarily have an awareness of, but definitely should. There are thousands of studies, most of which prove differentiation is important. A quick search on Google will pull up a wealth of useful information.

Activity

Due to limitations in differentiation in China, I invite the reader to challenge ideas in this article as I believe this is still an ongoing discussion. Is there anything you agree with or disagree with? How could we as ESL teachers make learning better for all abilities? Note down some ideas that might help with differentiation and use a lesson plan template to plan a lesson, focusing how you could improve all abilities.

Here is a blank, basic template of a lesson plan from the popular website TES.

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/lesson-plan-blank-templates-6180872#>

Behaviour Management

Behaviour management is not all about imitating Roald Dahl's infamous Miss Trunchbull style shouting and scary demeanor. Instead, it's about rewarding good behaviour and making your students aware that bad behaviour has consequences. To assume all Chinese students are well disciplined by default is a mistake. Children will be children, and behaviour management will always play a large role in being an ESL teacher – even in China. This is arguably the most challenging aspect of teaching, especially when you are teaching a second language. However, if you take the time to develop techniques and implement these in your lesson, behaviour management will become a lot easier. This document will provide you with tried and tested techniques that have proved effective in creating a good learning environment.

Be Firm but Fair

New teachers often shy away from being 'strict' from fear it may take the enjoyment out of the lesson. As one teacher I met put it; 'I don't want to be a kill joy'. Behaviour management is less about being strict and more about being firm but fair. It's a balancing game.

Firm – Rules

As mentioned in the 'Your First ESL Lesson in China' guide, it's important to implement rules right from the start. Your students and colleagues will expect you to have rules, and if you make them crystal clear from the start, your students will know what is expected of them and what the consequences of not following them are. If they break the rules, consequences will occur as they made the decision to break them. Some rule ideas include:

- I will listen to my teacher,
- I will follow the directions,
- I will put my hand up when I want to speak,
- I will speak English only,
- I will not whisper to my friends in class,

Some additional rules that may deserve an instant reward are:

- I will tidy up the classroom,
- I will be nice to everybody (reward when seeing evidence of an act of kindness),
- I will help the teacher.

It is recommended that you start with about 5 rules (you can always add more in later lessons). It can be a lot for ESL students to take in. You should always refer to them if rules are abided by or broken and should regularly repeat rules every few weeks, or arguably every lesson.

Implementing rules does not have to be boring. Chinese students are very much used to class 'chants' where they speak as a group. Maybe you could create your own spoken

rule 'chant' for your classes. Check out the two videos in the 'Your First ESL Lesson in China' guide for ways you can bring your classroom rules to life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iQg16bEGGM>

Maybe you could consider making your own funny video with your class rules.

Fair – Rewards

It's important to reward good behaviour. Every child wants to achieve something no matter how big or small that may be. Therefore, your lessons should contain rewards the kids can work towards. This ultimately encourages them not to act up in class and to pay attention. However, since many classes have an average of 40 students, it is likely that you will have between 600 and 1000 students per week. This is one of the main reasons behaviour management in ESL China is difficult; it is simply not feasible to buy weekly rewards for all of your students. Instead, consider the following as effective rewards that can encourage your students to work hard:

- High fives
- Stickers
- End of semester awards (candy, stationery, certificate)
- Fun video at the end of a lesson

You can use a points system over each lesson, a few weeks or a whole semester, rewarding students who have obtained the most points with something from the list above.

Chinese students respond well to competition and recognition, so any one of these methods will have a good effect on your students' behaviour.

If you decide to buy stickers or other rewards, you can do so easily through Taobao, the Chinese equivalent of E-Bay.



Firm – Consequences

Some students will be more disruptive than others, however any child will take an opportunity to talk to their friends if the teacher is not effectively implementing behaviour techniques. A headteacher once told me it's a teacher's job to give no reason for disruption, it's a student's job to find the loopholes. Therefore, it's important you always follow through with the consequences of breaking rules and apply the same rules to all students.

The Chinese school system does not allow teachers much freedom in the way they deal with rule-breakers in comparison to UK schools (I only have the UK to compare to for those who have experience in other countries). Detentions do not exist, and teachers

cannot send students out of the classroom in most schools due to pressure from the parents. Therefore, you must discipline your students during class time. One method commonly used by Chinese teachers is asking disruptive students to stand up in class, often at the back. As students already know this is as a result of breaking rules it is worth copying this. However, bringing it back to rewards having value, another a good method is to take a team point off their score. This again adds further value to the point system and encourages individuals not to let their team down.

It is also worth noting that every class has a class monitor whose responsibility it is to report to their assigned teacher. Use these monitors to assist you when needed but also pass on information to their class teacher about both good and bad behaviour in your classes. This can be very useful, depending on the communication skills of the class teacher.



If you have a child who is behaving particularly badly, it could be that there are other issues causing it. Bring them to the side and refrain from shouting. Go down to their level and ask, 'is there something wrong, because you don't seem to be yourself?' The likelihood is that there is something wrong. Children will respect that you were able to assist with their problems and feel more at ease with you. You will have to articulate this manner using words they will understand but this should give you an understanding of the manner you should implement.

Fair - Respect

At the start of the lesson, students are often still in break mode. Maybe they've just had a great PE lesson or have simply been having fun talking with their friends. Shouting at this point will cause them to lose respect for you and set a negative tone right at the start. Get there at the latest 5 minutes early and when you walk in, you have to expect that not everyone will be settled and ready to learn. When this happens, praise those who are behaving well to set a good example, and chat to those who are distracted, drawing their attention back to you:

'Hey John, that's a cool Minecraft picture you have drawn there, what's her name?'

student responds

'I see, that's great! Ok now let's put that away and get ready for class.'

'Well done Linda for being ready at your desk'

'Thank you George for having your books ready'

'Your desk looks really tidy Fiona, good stuff'

Start class with a clear interactive greeting such as 'good afternoon' to address everybody, ensuring you're raising your voice and that your students respond. If they don't, repeat it. This interaction makes students understand it is the beginning of lesson. You can then thank 'Fiona, George, Linda, John' or anyone you see fit for being ready and give a small reward. This is the most common piece of advice I give to teachers and they are always surprised at how simple but effective it is. Repeating in all aspects are good for ESL students.

If you have your own classroom, this process of settling them down and getting to know them is a lot more effective outside the classroom before they walk in. However, the likelihood is that you won't have your own classroom in a Chinese ESL environment, at least not in your first year.

Engagement

Engagement is a key factor in ensuring good behaviour. Boredom leads to distractions and potential disruptive behaviour. That is why it is important you plan your lessons effectively with activities that are going to engage everybody in the class. Group and pair work is always a great way to ensure everybody is involved. This is something that should be implemented in every lesson. Some examples include; having teams of students write as many adjectives on a piece of paper as they can, organising sentences into categories such as whether the sentence applies to a town or a city or matching travel vocabulary with pictures. Be creative with your activities, and you'll find that this has a good effect on how your students behave in your lessons.



Additional Resources

She may not be a teacher, but a great person to learn from when it comes to behaviour management techniques is Supernanny. She is incredible at what she does, and she explains the importance of setting rules and following through with them with consequences in many episodes and short clips on YouTube. Alongside this she demonstrates the importance of spending time with kids, rewarding and having fun. This always leads to improved behaviour and you can definitely adapt and apply the same techniques to your classroom.

Independent Activity

1. Let's use Supernanny as our activity. Here we see a child who is disrespecting the implementation of rules. Note how there is no shouting within this video, however the message gets across when the parent is firm.

What sequence did both Supernanny and the parents do to ensure a positive outcome?

Do you agree with this approach and if not, what would you do differently?

Using this video, adapt your own behaviour management techniques for the classroom.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19cxbfbUZtY>

2. The second Supernanny video shows an elaborate reward system for a child with ADHD. Note how the child said, 'this is awesome'. This demonstrates that children love rewards.

Can you think of your own reward system? What can you do that is different to any other teacher?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19cxbfbUZtY>

How Chinese Teaching Methods Can Impact Your Lessons

It is important, not only for your classes, but from a wider cultural view point to understand the Chinese school system. The fact that China is an average of 3 years ahead when it comes to subjects such as Maths goes to show that there are exceptional benefits to the Chinese school system that we can learn from. However, like anything it also has its disadvantages. Bringing the Western and Chinese systems together can be difficult for both teachers and students to adapt to. But it's important to learn how you can use the advantages of both systems to create the ideal learning environment for all. This document focuses specifically on the Chinese education system and how we can use it to better our western style of teaching.

Why Have a Foreign Teacher in China?

To understand the answer to this question, it's important to know what the motives for implementing western teaching concepts into the Chinese School System are. The modern Chinese job market is extremely competitive, and parents are gradually realizing that, in order to have a competitive advantage, their children need to speak English and potentially study abroad.

Foreign teachers help not only help students' English improve, but also prepare them for if they ever do go abroad, by helping them understand and appreciate western cultures and mindsets. In recent years, it's become increasingly common for schools to employ foreign teachers, meeting the demands of both the government and pupils' parents. Despite this, many parents still believe the Chinese teaching methodology is superior, which is why as a foreign teacher you often find yourself in a mix of both school systems.

An Average Day

Depending on time, age and school, students will have roughly a minimum of 8 lessons a day lasting between 35 to 40 minutes (there may be some exceptions). Between each lesson they have a 10-minute break. An advantage of this set-up is that you have time in-between lessons to get to know the students and build their confidence in speaking English to you in a more informal manner. It's also a chance to catch up with those who are falling behind or to carry out a punishment for misbehavior.



Presentation

When it comes to teachers presenting the class, you could argue that Chinese and Western teachers are completely opposite. Chinese teachers often adopt a 'teacher led' style of instruction, giving a lecture to a whole class, whereas a western teacher would likely give students the tools they need to work things out and learn for themselves. This 'student led' style includes group work, pair work and problem solving.

Lecturing works for Chinese teachers, because the children fully understand the language. In an ESL classroom however, this is unlikely to work, as students do not fully understand the language and can easily get distracted. This is where we can bring in some of the advantages of interactive group work to help maintain attention. Of course, this may not be as easy as it sounds; Chinese students may not be used to group work because it's not commonly used in the Chinese education system. Therefore, students may not be as responsive as you wish. It is up to you to establish a routine that, over time, the children will get used to and consequently feel more confident with. Such activities help build up great social skills and confidence, which are two important aspects of learning any language.

Unity

Children in China are used to doing things as a group. Watch the morning exercise routines they do, and you'll see that they're in almost perfect sync. This is quite spectacular to watch, and it's something western school children would probably have a hard time emulating. This simultaneous style can be used in the classroom, as the children are used to it. Reading is a perfect example. If you place a piece of text on the board, a class of 40+ students will be able to read it together in unison. This is an excellent activity as it practices fundamental reading but also gets everyone involved. Activities that involve everyone maximize class time and give everyone a chance to learn together. Other examples of unity include singing and dancing. You can find many videos online that you can use in class to get everyone involved and having fun.

Repetition

The Chinese school system places a heavy focus on memorization and repetition. Students are therefore accustomed to this and have the incredible ability of absorbing and reciting large amounts of information. Although this style does not allow for problem solving activities, repetition and memorising is actually very good for learning a second language. It's a good idea to use this technique when revising information from previous lessons and teaching vocabulary and grammar. It's been proven that if you learn something, repeat it tomorrow and then repeat it in a month, it will be stored in your long-term memory. So, you shouldn't be shy to use this method, especially if you're teaching young children. Don't forget – you can always mix up activities and content when using this method so that it doesn't get boring for your students.

Leadership

Every Chinese classroom has a class leader who is responsible for reporting incidents to their formal class teacher and helping you out with anything from collecting papers to finding a student you need to talk to. This student is usually one of the best behaved of the class, and they're expected to lead by example. In an ESL classroom, you may find these advantages are diminished if the student does not speak very good English. If you find yourself in this situation, consider appointing your own English class leaders. Any students who demonstrate excellence in English can be awarded English Leader. Not only is this great for you having a helping hand, it's also a great method for motivating students to achieve this status.

A Chinese school class usually begins with a loud, interactive chant that signals the start of a lesson. As mentioned in a previous guide, this is an example of an 'attention grabber' and is something Chinese students respond well to. It's a good idea to create your own English chant that you can use to help students understand when it's time for class.

The 'gaokao'

The '*gaokao*' is the most important exam of a Chinese person's life. It determines a student's future career prospects and earning potential. The Chinese schooling system is designed around this exam, and there is an enormous amount of pressure put on children from a young age by both parents and teachers, who want them to succeed. Teachers are highly respected and considered the key component to helping students succeed in the exam, which is likely the reason why lessons are often teacher led. Group work and student-led activities are widely recognized as being a waste of time, as students are not getting information directly from the teacher to help them in the *gaokao*.

When it comes to ESL teaching, you are not usually required to help students prepare for the *gaokao*, so this does not influence your curriculum, as this is down to the Chinese teachers. Therefore, Chinese teachers will often leave interactive activities and group work to the foreign teacher. Such activities are slowly becoming recognised as necessary, due to the social benefits. It is therefore encouraged for you to do it. Though you may not be required to structure your lessons around the *gaokao*, it's worth talking to your Chinese colleagues to find out if you can cover any particular topics to act as a reinforcement.

Extra Resources

There was a fascinating documentary in the UK in 2016 called 'Are Our Kid's Tough Enough for Chinese School?' where Chinese teachers came in to a UK school and implemented the Chinese system as an experiment to a set group of students. They then compared this class's exam results to the rest of the school. This 3-part series is not only informative of the contrast between Western and Chinese schools, but also very entertaining. Who wins? Watch to find out:

Episode 1 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzV2U_nplws

Episode 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieFn0RkYstQ>

Episode 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLFTdHkROtY>

For more information, read our blog post '[What You Need to Know About Chinese Teaching Methods](#)'.

Activity

When you get to your school, I highly recommend asking to watch a Chinese teacher's lesson. Even if you don't understand Chinese, it will help you understand what students respond to. You can then use some of the techniques you pick up and implement them in your lesson, whether that's behaviour techniques or learning techniques. The best way to do this is by becoming friends with a Chinese teacher and asking them – they will of course be more comfortable answering if they know you a bit better. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable, so please respect this if they say no. If you are lucky enough to have found out information from a Chinese teacher, what did you learn and how are you going to implement some Chinese techniques into your lesson?

A Personal Note

There are arguments for and against both the Chinese system and the Western system. Some may argue that the Chinese system is out dated, however over the past five years of my own teaching, I am starting to see how the Chinese system is learning from the western system and vice versa. Mandarin is starting to be integrated into the curriculum of many western schools, and over the next few decades we're likely to see more and more Chinese resources and teachers in western schools. The documentary mentioned above is a testament to how Chinese schools can improve western schools. In my current workplace I have met teachers from all over the world who have visited China to learn from the Chinese style. This shows the money schools in the west are willing to put in, in order to get the best for their schools. It is important that we do not get too complacent in believing that your style is the best style of teaching. As an ESL teacher you have an excellent opportunity to learn as much as you can from a vastly different system, and this new information can be extremely beneficial to your future career.

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