

## CLTeacher: Teachers in the Spotlight

*Danielle Coppée* Teacher of Chinese, the Netherlands

Danielle Coppée is a teacher of Chinese in the Netherlands. She works at four different schools – across primary, secondary and adult learning, and has been teaching Chinese since 2012. Danielle spent two years in Taiwan after gaining a Masters in Chinese Language and Culture from Leiden University, and after straying away from Sinology for a number of years, she returned to school for further studies, and received a post-graduate certificate of education in Chinese language and culture.

Because she works with such a range of students – both in level and age – Danielle finds it challenging to adapt teaching styles, and to find age appropriate activities and content. Her younger learners are fun to work with, and are happy to listen, copy and play games. Her older students are more demanding simply because of their life experiences, and she enjoys engaging with them on difficult topics like religion and politics. But, with all of her students, Danielle likes to take an inductive approach to learning wherever possible. She says ‘It’s very satisfying when you can see students having an ‘aha’ moment, where suddenly part of the puzzle comes together, and they make a big step forward...it’s important for students to be encouraged to work things out for themselves – they will invariably remember more, remember better.’

In the Dutch curriculum for Chinese, culture is a big element and a requirement – in fact the subject is officially called ‘*Chinese Language and Culture*.’ Teachers therefore have to carefully weave culture into their language lessons. Danielle points out that this can be time-consuming, if you want to make it meaningful and relevant. In the Netherlands, this is even more challenging if you’re looking to use materials that are written for learners of Chinese, but with English rubrics or subtitles. There are relatively few resources that are specifically aimed at Dutch speakers, so often things need to be adapted – and there is often the issue that the English level may be too high. It also takes a lot of time to find appropriate materials on the internet as the quality may be poor, or the length may not be suitable. Danielle feels that the best way around this is to collaborate and share ideas with other teachers. In her role as Secretary for *Levende Talen Chinese Section* (a teacher’s organisation for teachers of Chinese in the Netherlands), she is in a good position to encourage communication:

‘We not only organise workshops, but we also have our own What’s App group and a Dropbox where teachers can post activity ideas, templates, images, and links – anything they feel will be useful. This helps us all work in a much more efficient manner.’

Danielle feels the most challenging aspect of learning Chinese is maintaining enthusiasm when students start to have difficulty retaining characters. She says, ‘the reality is that learning new vocabulary, and the characters, takes so much more effort than with other languages. Regular review is essential – but the problem is students don’t want to review in the same way over and over again. I try and use lots of different games to review characters like crosswords, bingo, and card games. It’s also fun to use music – there are many well-known songs that have been translated into Chinese and covered by other artists. These are great to use to get students to ‘guess the song,’ and to then hear it. Bruno Mars’ ‘Lazy Song’ is covered by Adam Tan – my students love this one!’ She also believes that you need to go slow and take time at the start to get the basics right, especially with pronunciation and radicals. If you rush these key things, she feels students will get frustrated, and won’t have a solid foundation for quality learning ahead.

The Netherlands is traditionally a country that places a lot of emphasis on language learning and teaching. In addition to Dutch and English, students must choose a 3<sup>rd</sup> compulsory language and there are different options, with Chinese being one. Danielle says, ‘It’s a challenge to keep schools interested in Chinese, and to make decision makers aware of the importance of learning this language. My concern is that the government has plans to drop the 3<sup>rd</sup> compulsory language in the future, and that will be a loss for learners. Being tri-lingual is a real asset, and without government support this may eventually disappear.’ That isn’t great news for the learning and teaching of Chinese in the Netherlands, but hopefully families will recognise the benefits of having a 3<sup>rd</sup> language and encourage kids to continue learning, even if it’s not a requirement.

*Macmillan Education would like to thank Danielle Coppée for her input into this issue of CLTalk, and for being our ‘Teacher in the Spotlight.’ You can download Danielle’s activity **Quartets Card Game** also in this issue at: <http://www.mydiscoverchina.com/cltalk-issue-16/>*