

Reflection #3

Teach vocabulary and grammar in contexts with effective elicitation techniques

There are three elicitation techniques we covered in the workshop today by Tseng Laoshi: mechanical drills, meaningful drills and communicative drills. When the group activity “identify the correct elicitation techniques” including six techniques given to us, the most confusing question for me are: 1) how to identify student centered vs. teacher centered activities, and meaningful vs. communicative drills, which are identical to performance based teaching and learning in STARTALK context, as well as my own teaching besides. For teacher centered vs. student centered, as long as it’s teacher initiated and leading the drill, it will be regarded as teacher centered. On the other hand if students initiated and working collaboratively to construct the drill, it should be student centered. Besides, communicative drill should be the ideal practice in a language class because it focuses on applying the target language in real life situations with ideally using authentic language material, and requires well-organized elicitation skills from the teacher. In upcoming STARTALK teaching, vocabulary and grammar are THE key components. I therefore discussed and talked with my teaching partner about how to conduct it. There are several “insights” we discussed and agreed to be applicable:

To Vocab:

1. Reduce or even eliminate verbal mechanical drill by involving online study tools or platform like Quizlet before class;
2. Maximize the usage of new vocabs in teaching the target lesson while teaching face-to-face sessions (flood input);
3. Design and encourage of the new vocab in the after-class assignments to enhance the acquirement (pushed output).

To Grammar:

1. Assign grammar/textbook grammar to students to preview before class;
2. Encourage or remind students gently to use the target grammar via meaningful drills and communicative drill with teachers or peers during class session (flood input and pushed output);
3. Purposely require students to produce complete sentences or paragraphs to reflect grammar covered in the lesson.

Principles & strategies: create a well-designed PowerPoint file for effective online teaching

Different from traditional face-to-face classroom, PowerPoint might not be the necessary segment of teaching material in class, but online instruction requires well-organized and prepared slides to reflect the learning target, and seduce students to produce the expected output. A good PowerPoint will double or even triple the outcome of the teaching session. In order to do so, there are several insights we realized and follow in creating our PowerPoint for Opening ceremony and future slides:

1. Design and stay with a systematic icon “language” to communicate with students in the powerpoint. A good system of classroom management language system (both orally and symbolically) will set up a good “tone” with student from the very beginning of the course and cultivate a good communicative system between students and teacher, which could effectively improve and refine the pace of the class;
2. Use authentic pictures or other elements. Henny Laoshi stressed the importance of using authentic pictures instead of clip arts in the first session of the online training, I cannot agree more. Authentic pictures could convey not only the meaning, but also increase the cultural weight. It helps connect the language we are studying to our everyday life – it’s visible, vivid and real for students, instead of “Chinese only exist in the world of clipart”.
3. Make the content interactive. Online environment itself will cause the loss of delivering content, but interactive design could maximize students’ participation and provide the opportunity for teachers to launch formative assessments and provide quick feedbacks.
4. Stay focus. UVA template, one font, simple colors, nice layout, all these keep our slides in an easy way for students to follow, which also contribute to the enjoyable and success of Powerpoint. Don’t make our students spend too much time and energy to figure out what/how to understand the content of the slides, but more about the language itself.

Reflection #4

Online Opening ceremony

Online Opening ceremony is one of the most exciting moments of STARTALK since the first day, because today we met our students for the first time online, and this is the first real experience of online face to face teaching. When the music of Zoom testing music “Welcome to Beijing” started, I believe every single one of us got excited and full of positive energy towards ourselves and the upcoming session. My first opening ceremony session with my partner Amy went smoothly, WiziQ worked fine, students were both online, had their devices set up well, except Amy’s headset seemed not working, but the good

news is I could still hear her clearly and pick up the lost thread of her voice and continue interacting with students. Our group A students are both fluent students, one is heritage speaker and the other is Korean speaker, our teaching expectation might need to adjust a bit to fit them better. When things go smoothly, the trouble might be at the corner. Right before the second session, my computer failed to connect to WiziQ after trying many times and changed between browsers, I had to restart my computer 10 minutes before the session started, and still cannot log in as the initiator of my session. This time my partner Amy completely saved me! My heroin Amy! Technology is really something you can blend in your hate and love!

Workshop of Online Chinese Teaching on Saturday Morning

Dr. Murphy-Judy was invited to hold the workshop of online foreign language teaching. She is a very experienced and passionate pioneer of teaching foreign language online, she has been keep trying out ideas of teaching French online for over three decades! I found her session very inspiring, there are several key points she mentioned I cannot agree more: online learning is never been easy for students, they are struggling as much as we do, they need to first learn to become a language learner with right methodology to study the language; second they are new to Chinese language, curiosity, excitement and a little insecure all blended together for them; third the whole online learning format is new to them too, they will also be panic when fail to press certain button or follow up as told; last but not least they might not be digitally ready – they might be daily user of Facebook and Instagram, but they might not have no idea of how to learn online, these are four challenges for our students. Therefore in order to generate higher student pass rates, there should include Communicative learning goals, more than one instructional staff, more time to design & develop, more PD in CALL for designers & faculty, use of IT experts & content experts in design. Look over the shoulder of our STARTALK this year, this is EXACTLY how the program was set! Every single element contributes to the final success of our program! I'm so very looking forward to see the team work of our effort, the progress our students made, get to know our team teachers better, have the chance to communicate and interactive with more experts from University of Virginia, and achieve more than we suppose to! 加油!

Reflection #7

Today is my first teaching day, both classes went relatively smoothly, I truly grateful that my partner provided seamless assistance and supervisor teachers offered very critical, precise and helpful advices. I therefore want to reflect the pros and cons of my teaching.

My teaching

The first class had only one student, he is highly motivated and has fairly high proficiency level. Several aspects I did well in the first session:

- 1) I think my deliver to student is smooth during the entire session, no glitch between slides, almost has no moment blanked out or forgot words;

2) I could quickly grasp the information from student's answers and generate new questions to approach student to strengthen the practice of the target phrases or grammar;

3) I did it! I insisted only speaking Chinese to students in probably over 95% of the class time, students are just amazing! They could understand so much and respond so well! One of my goals that using over 90% target language achieved on my first teaching day!

However there are several aspects I think I could improve for upcoming teaching sessions:

1) Improve and refine the skill of explain new words in Chinese. In the first class session I had a hard time explain “地址” – I think I first said “地址就是你家的地址” hahaha hilarious! My partner did excellent on this skill, I need to observe her more and get more knowhow on this point;

2) Adjust expectations toward student when push the output. My first student Wujin has excellent proficiency level, he could do beyond frequent Q&A and reach the compound sentences. I could've ask him to use more conjunction words like “因为……所以” or “虽然，但是” to output a presentation with the length of 8-10 sentences.

3) Better prepare Chinese description for content like “Can-do statement” or “objectives”. I prepared in my mind yesterday how I want to clarify the objectives today, but still struggled choosing specific words for students, some of them can understand effortlessly, but some of them still struggled and several minutes wasted just because of that.

Looking forward to teaching the Day 4!

Reflection #8

Today I finished my 2nd day teaching, we finished Day 4, it went smoothly as well, but with better understanding and knowledge of students, it was much easier to interact and push students to output complete sentences and paragraphs. At the same time, my partner Amy provided seamless support towards my teaching, especially the explanation of words students didn't know, either from my teaching or from other students' responses. There are several things I think I could still improve in my future teaching after watching my own teaching video:

1) Insert and purposely create more student-centered activities periodically. The reason I use “periodically” is because teacher-centered activities are also important, but apparently teacher-confronted only is not ideal. My teaching today involves quite amount of teacher-student interactions, but rarely have pure student-student activities. In my next teaching session, I want to include more student-centered activities in every 15-20 minutes, to really “let go” to follow the pattern of “小用 – 大用”.

2) Lead students to involve in conversation with each other, instead of purely interact with teacher. In my second teaching session, students are more used to question and answer only with me but not each other, which may lead to less exercise for students.

3) Prepare more “conjunction” questions for students to output more paragraphs. Conjunction words like “除了...以外”, “虽然...但是...”, “第一, 第二, 第三, 最后” and “首先, 然后, 最后” can hardly pop up when teaching, but my students are capable of output sentences with these conjunction words. I need to prepare more words handy to facilitate higher quality and better output.