Self-reflection #1

I have been interested in learning about how to effectively teach Chinese online for a few years. My biggest doubt about teaching a language online is how to make the instruction interactive. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to attend this StarTalk program to learn from the experts and to have hands-on training alongside excellent teachers from all over the country.

This has been an exciting first week of online training. After a brief review of the theories of best practices, we got to watch and analyze in great deal two demo-teaching videos. The videos made by Cai Laoshi and Zhong Laoshi demonstrated how they conducted small group lessons using Zoom, or using Zoom and Nearpod combined. Zhong Laoshi demonstrated several of the interactive tools that Nearpod offers, such as quizzes, polls and collaboration. Students were able to type answers to various questions and share their answers. I especially liked the brief handwriting exercise. I can't wait to try them out!

Cai Laoshi's teaching demo showed me that an online lesson can be just as interactive as face-to-face lessons. We watched a video of Cai Laoshi's face-to-face class before the Zoom lesson demo. I realize that the online platform didn't affect Cai Laoshi's teaching style. Her high quality input flood, as well as the sentential-level pushed output from students were just as impressive in the online lesson as those of the face-to-face lesson. Cai Laoshi explained that due to time limits, the demo teaching couldn't include an interactive activity she designed where the students would have a yard sale where they will demonstrate their ability to describe an item, to bargain and to finalize a sale. This is a well-designed performance-based assessment to evaluate how well students reached all three learning objectives shown at the beginning of the lesson.

Both lessons clearly followed the backward design principle. This is a very helpful reminder to me in creating lessons for the practicum. The detailed analysis of the instructional flow of the two teaching demos is extremely helpful for me too. It provides an excellent example for me.

Self-reflection #2

By now I've conducted my mini-teaching demo using Zoom and Nearpod. It is a lot of work but exciting! Online teaching takes more precise planning. I believe the process of this exact planning is a good training for my teaching. It is very clarifying to approach a lesson based on backward design: from identifying learning objectives that are communicative functions, to designing ways for students to carry out those functions, then to creating instructional activity to reach the objectives. In the past, I was often more worried about how many of the language points and how many vocabulary I needed to help students learn than faithfully following the backward design principle.

One challenge common to online teaching is how to make the virtual classroom interactive. From these last two week's training, I realize that first of all, our way of teaching doesn't change because of the platform change, from real classroom to virtual classroom. Once we have a solid lesson plan, we employ the same best practices, such as comprehensible input flood and push for sentential output, as well as interactive activities following the pattern "I do - we do- you do". What we do need to change is to prepare interactive activities more carefully and to use different tools. For example, using Nearpod, we can create a quiz, a poll, or a collaboration board. These reading and writing/typing activities help engage students. However, after these activities, we must try to follow up with some speaking tasks.

Many tools are at our disposal to enhance online teaching. Online teaching puts students more in charge of their own learning. Teachers can take advantage of technological tools to facilitate pre-class and post-class learning, leaving the class time to focus on key language functions. For example, students can use Quizlet and video tutorials to preview key vocabulary and language points. After class they can create a learning community on Padlet by sharing audio and video recordings of their assignments; assignments that demonstrate their skills in all three communicative modes.

This being said, not all students are self-driven enough to be totally in charge of their own learning, at least not at the beginning. We, as teachers, must set very clear expectations, and communicate these expectations to students without ambiguity. We must also proactively assess learning outcome. Providing timely feedback is also crucial to quality online teaching.

In this training, we the teacher trainees focus only on practicing effective class time instruction. However, tremendous amount of effort by the administrative team is put into designing and implementing pre-class and post-class learning activities. I hope to learn about those strategies as well.

Self-reflection #6

Teamwork is a big highlight here at UVA Startalk 2018. Besides making more connections and friendship, I learned a lot from my peers. The program assigned one lead teacher to each group of teachers. This lead teacher helps keep us on track of tasks and gives us individual, very detailed guidance on how to deliver the lessons. Zhong Laoshi is our "Da Laoshi", Our team is very supportive of each other. We are a nice mix of personalities and teaching background. We were able to collaborate as a team throughout the program. The process was very productive and joyful. To prepare each lesson, Zhong Laoshi would gather our group together to come up with an overall plan. We start with identifying learning objectives, then assessments and corresponding instructional activities. We thread the assessments and activities in logical order or along a story line, and divide the whole lesson into 3 or 4 chucks based on the learning objectives. Then we form smaller groups to adopt one or two chunks to work on PowerPoint presentations and Nearpod activities. Once done, we

put the slides together on Google drive to share. Zhong Laoshi would lead us on going through the slides one by one and decide what questions to ask or what scaffolding to add. We usually spend a couple of hours to edit and modify. Once a group version is created, we each may tweak some according to our own styles and our students' needs. The night before the lesson, Zhong Laoshi invited us to go through a dry run of the lesson individually. The first day's lesson planning took the most time, however, we were all very happy with how our lesson turned out. The wisdom and energy of the teamwork gave me materials that I cannot possibly produce alone. Feeling thoroughly prepared, I was able to interact with students with confidence and ease. All the hard work paid off.

This way of collaboration not only reduced my workload, but also taught me valuable lesson planning skills. I hope to watch more of my team members' teaching videos when I have time. I want to see how they delivered the same lesson plan. From these videos, I believe there are a lot of teaching skills for me to learn. A big shout-out for our Da Laoshi and my teammates: Zhai Laoshi, Zhao Laoshi, Feng Laoshi, Yu Laoshi and Song Laoshi! Love you all!

Self-reflection #7

Whether it is teaching face-to-face in a real classroom or face-to-face online, it is just as important to build connections with students. I had reviewed the students' basic information and their video self-introduction before hand. Once I met the students during the opening ceremony, I felt a connection with them already. When the actual teaching started, I felt that I knew enough of the students to be able to test and adjust my pace and my questions on the go. Another tool the program designed to strengthen connections and build community is through carefully designed homework assignments. I enjoyed reading the students' daily blog posts about their virtual tours to Beijing. One of their assignments was to record them singing a Chinese song. All the teachers had fun listening and watching those videos. From their smiles, I can tell that the students enjoyed doing a recording at the comfort of their home then share with everyone.

My students seemed very well prepared for lessons. They were actively engaged in the learning activities the whole time. My first group of two students started out quiet but they were always fully engaged and willing to speak when called on. They worked beautifully on pair work. My second group of two students are at a more advanced level of proficiency. They were eager and confident to express themselves. During the last two lessons, I had the chance to add two students to my second group. The four-student lessons were my favorite part of teaching. On the other hand, I didn't have the chance to teach the first group students during the last week, which leaves a little piece of regret for me.

Self-reflection #8

At the beginning of the training session Tseng Laoshi reminded us to "empty our bottle" in order to learn the most. With that mindset, I can feel my bottle getting filling up with nourishment day by day. I've learned so much, and I feel so much appreciation for my peers, the master teachers, the director and the assistants. The two weeks of online teaching was very enjoyable, with many learning points and highlights.

First of all, now I feel that I want to, and will be able to conduct future lessons in close to 100% target language. I embrace the idea of immersion style of teaching, however in practice, I often slip to the convenience of English. In doing so, I was depriving my students of valuable some learning opportunities. I realize that in order to implement immersion style teaching, I will need to constantly develop my skills to produce i+1 comprehensible input.

Secondly, after this training, I believe I can put backward design into action in my teaching. I recall learning about this theory and created lesson plans accordingly during my graduate studies and previous training, however, I have never been so clear about how to actually design my instruction this way. I was often lead by the textbooks – vocab, grammar, text, etc. Even though we achieved learning objectives, however, it wasn't that clear to students. During UVA Startalk 2018, together with me team, I prepared each lesson following backward design. Drill after drill, I had the opportunity to take backward design by heart. I trust that I will be able to consistently design objective-driven lessons in the future.

Another important gain for me was to learn how to elevate meaningful exercises to communicative activities, which can help boost learners' proficiency level. I think I use communicative activities a lot in my regular teaching, however, the training made it more clear for me. I will be able to intentionally incorporate more open-ended questions and communicative activities to allow them to express themselves by creating with language.

In the course of the training, there were too many learning points to list. Now it is my turn to use what's saved in the bottle to produce lots of interesting and effective lessons.

Self-reflection #10

The program has come to a closure. I am deeply inspired and moved by how well the program was designed and executed. It is hard for me to pick out any flaws.

I love the balance of theory and practice in this program, which lays more emphasis on practice. The amount of practice is sufficient for me to be able to solidify the best practices that I learned. In the past, I attended numerous workshops. A lot of times, most of what I learned became nothing beyond a moment of enlightenment in

theory that didn't have the chance to become part of my instructional repertoire. This time, I had altogether five lessons to prepare with my team and eight times to lead a lesson. The amount of practice allows me to internalize the guiding principals and best practices.

I love the people of the program the most! It brings me a smile when I think of everyone: Tseng Laoshi is highly regarded in the field, and known for her high expectations for students and trainees, yet she is very approachable and fun. Her uplifting spirit defines the atmosphere of the program; she provides personalized guidance to trainees in a direct and compassionate way. The gentle and humble Gao Laoshi is the powerful technology backbone for the whole program, who always came to our rescue cheerfully and was always capable of resolving our puzzles and troubles with our computers or softwares. Our beautiful and kind master teachers, Zhong Laoshi and Cai Laoshi gave us a lot of detailed support and guidance in lesson planning. My peers are teachers from all over the country with various professional backgrounds. I learned a lot from them as a teacher and as a person. We worked on lesson planning in two groups throughout the practicum. My group rocks!! Our collaboration was efficient and pleasant. I benefited a lot from our teamwork, especially in terms of designing performance-based assessment and standard based instructional materials that are rich in authentic materials. Last but not least, I was very fortunate to have a roommate who is like a long lost friend to me. I treasure the times we had together taking early morning walks, playing Jazzminton and practicing Taichi in our room, walking to and from classrooms, and discussing our lessons, etc. Last, but not least, the students were amazing. They were all highly motivated. They were at different proficiency levels. Some were more outgoing and some were quieter, but they all worked well together. I could see connections being formed among the students in our virtual classrooms.

Throughout the program, despite the intense schedule and workload, I felt an overwhelming sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Our individual needs were well taken care of and we were held to high expectations as trainees and instructors for the student program. The content of the training was carefully designed to be the most effective. The inspiration I get from this program will be with me for a long time.