

2014 University of Virginia Star Talk Chinese Teacher Academy
Self-Reflection
by
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Day 2

Summarize of “Input to Output: A teacher’s Guide to Second Language Acquisition”

1. **The more input, the better** – Input is defined as language the learner hears or reads that has communicative intent or is meaning-based. Input can be incorporated in many ways, such as immersion, content-based instruction, and Natural Approach.
2. **The more interaction, the better** – The interaction should focus on meaning and be level appropriate for learners.
3. **All learner production should be meaning-based or communicative**
4. **Focus on form should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication**
5. **We should watch out for what we expect of learners** – We shouldn’t expect learners to produce what they can’t produce.

A lot of people inspire me and reshape my teaching philosophy, especially my students. For Title I students, academics are not their main focus in their life. There is a story behind each of the students, some can persevere through the adverse conditions they grew up in and become successful in school while others, unfortunately, cannot. Watching my first year students graduate this year and seeing them grow and mature throughout the years proves to me that all students have a certain goal and direction in mind, though some might need more time than others to come to that conclusion. Although I can’t help all my students be successful in Chinese, at least I can provide a safe environment away from their daily hardships for an hour each day.

The student-center classroom - Language is a skill just like driving and playing musical instruments; the more practice, the better you are. In order to utilize classroom time more efficiently so that the students can have more chances to practice, student-centered activities are a must. Before the student-centered approach can be successful implemented in the classroom, however, the teacher must explain the benefits of it and train students gradually. In Dr. Tseng’s book, there are 12 student-centered activities based on a communicative approach, most of them with detailed steps of how to implement them. The approaches and activities detailed in the book are a very good resource and I will try to implement some in the classroom next year.

Authentic materials – From previous trainings, I learned that using authentic materials is a must. Even so, I didn't know how to use the authentic materials in language instruction because I thought they were mainly used to teach culture. Today Dr. Tseng showed us how to use pictures, video clips, and songs in student-centered activities. I learned the different types of questions and topics to ask students after watching videos in order to engage them in discussion, allow for comprehension of the topics, and most importantly, give them a chance to practice their speaking and listening skills.

Day 3

Being a biology major, I was always fascinated about living things, especially how to keep us happy and healthy. It was nice to hear Dr. Ferree talking about the brain and language learning and also learning that the brain cells continue to multiply as long as they are being used. Generally speaking, using multiple modalities (audio, verbal, motor, touching) when learning a new language is more efficient than only using one modality. It usually requires the meaningful input of the word twelve times in order for the vocabulary word to stick. Furthermore, emotion also affects our learning; when we feel happy, relaxed, and safe, we retain more information. For my students, creating a safe learning environment away from their daily hardships might improve their learning.

I learned the three types of elicitation techniques: mechanical drills, meaningful drills, and communicative drills. Communicative drills are the preferred practice to use in an immersion classroom because it is closer to what the students will encounter outside of the classroom.

In order to have 100 % target language in the classroom, we can use TRP, gestures, facial expressions, photos, images, concrete objects, and contextual clues to explain new concepts or topics. Out of those, I have yet to use contextual clues, however, it is a very good method to explain and allow students to discover the meaning themselves when a simple picture will not suffice.

Day 4

I heard Dr. Tseng mention Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) when she did a workshop in Dallas last August. Because I had not previously heard of any books in the same topic, I was very happy to find out when Dr. Tseng said that there are lots of rubrics in her new

book about IPA. For me, it is very time consuming to come up with a task specific rubric; usually, I make one rubric for each project every six weeks. It is very nice to have an IPA/rubric resource book specific for Chinese teaching.

I realized that most of the “tasks” I designed in my classroom are actually non-task because of the lack of context. It was good to have some hands-on experiences on how to write an IPA in the classroom today. First, we let the students interpret some authentic material (interpretive communication phase). Then, the students discuss how a particular topic pertains to the information they have just interpreted (interpersonal communication phase). Finally, the students report their conclusions (presentational communication phase). I really want to try applying this plan at least once on my students to see how it might work, however, with 180 students next year; I must prepare a lot before I jump in.

Although I was very nervous when I did the demo, thanks for all the constructive criticisms and suggestions from all of the teachers. When planning, it will make me consider the purpose of the activities and whether the students will have the opportunity to have either meaningful drills or communicative drills.

Day 5 Technology Training

This is the fourth time I have attended Chen laoshi’s class. The majority of the technology I use in my classroom was learned from Chen laoshi, such as Quizlet, Edmodo, Google voice, Twitter, Screencast, etc. Even though this is the fourth time I've heard Chen laoshi’s class, she still has a lot of new information to share and I really enjoy her class. It is nice to know all the new techniques we can use in the classroom. When the timing is right, I know which technology can put to use.

I believe the purpose of using technology is not only to adapt to modern standards and practices, but also to improve students’ learning and allow for a more efficient use of classroom time. However, in order to implement the technology in the classroom, we need both equipment (computer, internet, etc.) and personnel (teacher knowledge, student ability, and technologist). Missing any part will result in a very bumpy process.

Since I am teaching at a Title I school, the majority of the students’ computer skills are not very good. Some of them don’t know how to open a document; others need to create a new account every time we work on the computer because they don’t remember their logins. Also, a

lot of them don't have a computer and/or internet access at home. I even had a student tell me that none of his family members have a phone; in order to help him finish the Google voice assignment I had assigned, I lent my cell phone to him because there was no phone in the classroom in our school and he didn't have money to use the payphone. Although it is very easy to give excuses as to why I don't incorporate more technology in the classroom, however, my goal is to incorporate at least one new technology each semester. That way my students won't be overwhelmed also can have more time to practice the new skill.

From Chen laoshi's slide, I think the concept of a flipped classroom is to have students do lower level thinking activities at home and mid to higher level thinking level activities in the classroom. Even so, I am confused; according to the oral proficiency guidelines, an intermediate level student should already know how to create his/her own language. Does that mean that intermediate level students have already reached the highest level of Bloom's Taxonomy? What other skills show that students are using "evaluate" and "analyze" thinking skills? Our school wants us to use higher level thinking verbs in our lesson plan. If I can explain to the principal that even I am using lower level thinking verbs, but students are actually doing higher level thinking activities, it will be very helpful.

2nd Teaching Practicum

This is my second teaching practicum. Compared to the first teaching practicum, I felt like this time was not as smooth as the last, even though I thought I was better prepared than the first time. Besides the topic being different from the last time, the students were also different. The topic was "Meeting a Chinese Host Family". Because these students were older than the last group, they adsorbed the new material faster than the younger students I had taught last time.

Although I felt like this teaching practicum was not as smooth, I did better on making the vocabulary practice not only have meaningful drills but also have mechanic drills for the whole class or individual, so that I can check their pronunciation. Also, I modeled the activities more thoroughly this time, giving the students just enough time to finish each activity. I had all three modes of communication. I asked questions first, then called on the students I knew who could answer the questions before calling on the shy or struggling student. For error correction, some students had trouble distinguishing between "guǒzhī" and "gǒuzhī". I didn't correct the students right away, but I did after the activity was over and had all of the students pronounce it the right

way together and then individually. However, if the student didn't use the right verb, I corrected them on the spot.

There are things I still need to improve on, such as checking the students' understanding more after other students' sharing or performance. I did it the first practicum, but I felt like I didn't do enough of it this time. Although I gave them examples and models, I didn't put all of the sentence structures (including the blank structure) the students need in order to accomplish the activity on the PowerPoint. The last activity, information gap – same or different, was a little too complicated for the students without the aid of scaffolding/hints. The students struggled at first, but eventually complete the activity. Although I felt more prepared, I now understand what I need the most attention on and will focus more on that for the next practicum.

3rd Teaching Practicum

Today was my third teaching practicum. The topic was “Shopping in Beijing” and the learning objectives were being able to identify names of colors in Chinese, express your likes and dislikes regarding to clothes and colors, and describe a person's outfit.

I have taught this topic before in my own classroom but not in 100% target language. It was challenging to come up with activities that had meaningful communication since everyone could see what color of clothing others were wearing. Luckily, this time I talked with master teacher Mrs. Lin during the preparation. She gave me some very practical advice that helped not only to reduce the time I needed to make the PPT, but also solve the problem about the color alteration when it project onto the screen.

I think I did okay this time. Students were able to accomplish the objectives I set for them. They were also pretty focused and completed the activity I asked them to do. I modeled the activity well this time, included sentence structure on all the worksheets, and incorporated a word bank with pictures to help the students complete their task.

Despite my improvement in areas I have lacked in in the past, there are still several things I need to improve upon, such as giving the students fewer jelly beans so that they will spend less time counting. Also, I should remind the students to say the name of the color while they were counting the jelly beans. Because the students took a little more time to finish counting the jelly beans, we didn't have enough time for every student to report what his/her friend was going to wear during the weekend getaway.

In the past, I was so used to working alone and solving the problems by myself. It was a privilege to learn from Tseng laoshi, the master teachers, and all of the other peers for the last two weeks. I have learned how to apply techniques better and not only improve upon my teaching style, but constantly adapt to new students. Using these newly acquired skills, I hope my students will be able to benefit greatly from all I have experienced.