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Reflection 6: Tuesday, July 5, 2011

I finished my practicum today and I felt relived.

Unlike my recent teaching, I was not nervous and I could not believe that I went to bed at 11:00pm. I arrived at the classroom 30 minutes before my class started. I double checked to see if I had any grammatical mistakes on my PowerPoint slides. I jotted down some notes and read my slides to myself many times. I told myself that I would perform well.

I asked my students some questions (e.g., time and date), but I noticed that my students were not able to answer my questions. Therefore, I spent 10 minutes helping my students review learned lessons, and I then taught a new lesson about buying clothes.

In this unit, I taught new sentences and phrases which were long and challenging to my students, so I asked some teachers to "teach" the lesson with me. These teachers and I practiced today's sentences many times, and then I asked students to practice today's sentences with their classmates. Because today's sentences were new and challenging, I noticed that my students did not get what I said right away. I should spend more time "practicing" some hard sentences with my students. I did not do well here.

In order to teach my students how to bargain in Chinese, my pace was kind of fast, and as a result, my students looked puzzled when they participated in activities. I wished I could help my students working on these more.

I thought my students had a great time in class; some of them learned how to buy clothes and how to bargain in Chinese. Also, I planned many activities so that my students had opportunities to "practice" Chinese with their classmates. The only thing I should improve is that I should plan more "communicative-based" activities rather than "mechanical" drills.

Overall, I thought I performed well in class. More importantly, I have noticed that I should provide more opportunities for students to use more Chinese with their classmates. I will keep this in mind and work on this in my own classroom this fall.

Reflection 5: Friday, July 1, 2011

I was extremely nervous before I taught today's lesson. I could not fall asleep and I could not eat anything, either. I revised my slides many times and asked other teachers for help. Finally, I turned off my computer and went to bed at 1:00am. I thought I was ready, but I was wrong.

Questioning students was my warm-up exercise. I thought my questions which were discussed in class many times should be responded to rapidly. However, my students did not understand my questions, and they were not able to answer them, either. I guess that they may have been confused about all of learned sentence patterns. Helping my students review learned sentences should be my priority.

Since my students were not able to answer my questions, I decided to help my students review. While reviewing, I heard students say, "Oh! I got it…" I felt fulfilled. More importantly, I heard my students say completed and grammatically correct sentences. My satisfaction and excitement could not be described while listening to them.

Because I spent some time reviewing learned sentences, I could not finish all of my PowerPoint slides. However, I think I controlled my time well and dismissed my students on time. Also, I gave them many opportunities to practice Chinese. I thought I did well, better than my previous performance. However, I must admit that my pace was a little fast, and I did not pay attention to all of my students. I should look at each child next time.

Over all, I think I am improving in teaching. I thank all of the teachers who worked with me while role-playing; I truly appreciate their constructive criticism. Teaching no doubt is team-based.

Reflection 4: Tuesday, June 28, 2011

I taught one class today. After teaching, the first thing I wanted to say is that all students in my class were polite, highly motivated, and well-behaved. I admired their hard work and effort. I wish my own students were like them.

I first made a seating chart, partly because I wanted to easily check my students' comprehension, and partly because I wanted each student to have more room to "perform." However, I overestimated my students' ability in Chinese, so they all just stood where they were. At that moment, I realized that I had to use a different approach in order to change my students' seats. Therefore, I put twelve index cards on my preferred seats, and I told those students to sit down. I could tell that they felt relieved when they were in their seats.

Then, I did not notice that some students in my "preferred" seats could not see my PowerPoint slides. When I asked the students questions, they were not able to share their answers with me. I finally realized that something was beyond my control, no matter how organized a plan was.

Because I did not expect that students would not understand my directions, I spent a lot of time "performing" and "modeling." Moreover, because I did not remember our class chant well, my students and I had different gestures for different actions. I could tell that some of my students were confused about differences of gestures. I learned that I should spend some time working on our class chant and gestures in order to avoid confusion.

After taking care of seating arrangements and singing our class chant, I started teaching. I think I did well; my classroom climate was positive and friendly and my students seemed to feel less pressure free in my class because they laughed once in a while. On the other hand, they seemed to have trouble "performing" and "talking" while doing activities. I did not think my directions in English were not clear because I had native English speakers proofread my sentences in English. I wrote key words on the board, but they were too small to see. As a result, my students did not perform well. I felt a little frustrated because I thought my activities could make my students "talk" more than one sentence. After talking to Dr. Tseng, I realized that key words should be on handouts. I will work on this for next time.

In order to create meaningful and communicative lessons, I spent a lot of time working on my lessons. Today, I made some mistakes, such as poor time management, but I learned that providing many opportunities for my students to "talk" and "perform" is necessary. I will keep this in my mind and will bring this into my own classroom this fall.

Reflections 3: Friday, June 25, 2011

I should improve my teaching skills, after teaching a mini lesson today.

Before I taught today's lesson, I thought I was good teacher. I used three to four activities which focus on students' four skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) during a-ninety-minute long class. I have been trying to learn how to properly manage my classroom. In addition, I have been attending educational workshops and conferences. I think my hard work definitely can sharpen my teaching skills, but I felt that I was a loser after teaching today's mini lesson.

My colleagues who pretended to be my "future" students did not get what I taught. I appreciated their "real" response and constructive criticisms because I knew that my "real" and "future" students might have the same reaction next week, if I did not improve my teaching skills.

My teammates and I spent three hours talking about our lesson. Then, I spent a couple of hours practicing what I would introduce, but I did not do well. I was frustrated because I first had some technical problems when I was working on my PowerPoint slides. Then, I did not realize that one of my slides only had Chinese characters which would confuse my "fake" students. I need help, so my students will understand what I want them to do. Can anyone provide some suggestions for me?

After today's practice, I realize that I am not as good of a teacher as I thought. I should revise my lessons and improve my teaching skills. While looking at other teams, I have gained some effective teaching ideas, such as how to teach "ordering food." Sharing good teaching techniques is indeed a way for professional development.

Reflections 2: Friday, June 24, 2011

This morning, I learned how to effectively use some electronic devices for better performance. For example, I knew文林, but I did not know how to use it. I did not know anything about Go Chinese until today. I believed that these devices could help teachers/students learn in the classroom. However, the fact is that students in my school district are not allowed to use any electronic devices during school hours. Moreover, my own experience reveals that teachers who bring electronic devices into the classroom need to have clear instructions, classroom management skills, and support from their schools.

Most students love electronic devices, so using some devices in class could create a student-centered and stress-free learning environment. Students would enjoy being placed under this classroom setting. On the other hand, some students tend to figure out their own electronic devices themselves rather than listening to their teachers. Moreover, some students might work on something else that is not related to their Chinese work when their teachers are reading instructions about how to submit their e-assignments. Also, electronic devices need maintenance (e.g., upgrading new files or programs, etc.). Teachers who do not have adequate knowledge of technology may panic when electronic devices do not work properly during instruction. Therefore, I suggest that teachers who are planning to use electronic devices in class should develop an organized plan before they teach their technology-based lesson (e.g., asking their school technician for advice, before teaching the lesson).

This afternoon I learned how to use TPRS. I sincerely thanked the presenter who used mainly German to conduct a lesson. However, I knew that I was behind because I was not able to catch up with my colleagues, and as a result, I felt overwhelmed. Furthermore, I thought the presenter talked too much, while students did not have enough time to "practice/use" the target language. I wonder if TPRS could be modified so that students who are learning the target language could talk some more. Moreover, I do not know if there is a good Chinese TPRS lessons available. I even wonder if TPRS is effective for languages that use alphabetic systems, which does not apply to the Chinese language.

Honestly, I do like to use TPR in the classroom and I use it often. However, my upper-level students do not like to participate in class when I use TPR in class because they think TPR is childish. When I use TPR in my lower level class, I only spend 10-15 minutes doing TPR with my students. This is because some of my students do not want to be labeled as losers, if they cannot follow my commands. We use block schedules on which each class period lasts ninety minutes long. I must design three to four different small activities in class or I will soon lose the interest of my students.

I enjoyed today's lessons because I had a chance to learn computer-based programs and besides I had opportunities to participate in activities, such as learning TPRS.

Reflections 1: Thursday, June 23, 2011

This morning, I revisited my definition of authentic materials and the application of using these authentic materials.

I, as a Chinese language teacher, have introduced authentic materials, which were designed/created by/for native speakers of Chinese. In my classroom, I use hand-written memos in Chinese, e-mail messages and many more. These authentic materials, however, are more reader-based. Recently, I started using Chinese songs and showing Chinese video clips in class. For example, last month, my students and I were talking about different menus between the target and host languages. Authentic materials also offered me an opportunity to teach my students some expressions that are beyond their textbooks, such as McDonald's slogan. One of the many advantages of using authentic materials is to enrich students' cultural and linguistic knowledge (i.e., phrases, etc.). For instance, my students can write and speak commonly used phrases which are used by native speakers. However, finding appropriate and suitable authentic materials for students with diverse background is not easy.

This afternoon, I learned the difference between exercises and tasks. Exercises focus on forms, while tasks emphasize meanings. Based on my experience (i.e. my students' maturity level and my school's A/B block schedules) creating a good task-based lesson is not easy for me. However, I can come up with some task-supported lessons that are more structural-oriented. My students who are not highly motivated and who are not eager to learn new, meaningful, and interesting lessons, need structures to support them to learn the Chinese language. Also, I think my students should be corrected immediately if they make a mistake in Chinese. Therefore, I feel that text-supported tasks are more suitable in my class.