

University of Virginia Star Talk Chinese Teacher Academy

Six Self-reflections

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6/27/2012 Wednesday -- Day 3 self-reflection:

This morning's presentation was fascinating. Dr. Ruth Ferree discussed current brain research dealing with second language acquisition. She also demonstrated many teaching techniques that a foreign language teacher should employ: authentic materials, meaningful repetition input, lots of interaction, modeling, comprehensive inputs, and a lot of hands-on activities. Love it!

- The first experiment was very interesting and helped me to realize that emotional and meaningful connections or even extra effort make learning language easier. It reinforces my idea of giving each Chinese character a story to help students learn characters. The network pattern of neurons is what allows us to perceive and understand the words, so meaningful repetition plays an important role in language learning, 12 times at least!
- The more different types of sensory simulation there are, the more effective the learning will be. The activation and coordination of ensemble seems important for the most effective thinking.
- Learning can occur without conscious effort.
- Innatists: Babies are born to learn all types of language, but when they get older, the environment they live in provides input and filters out their learning ability.
- Chinese (tonal language) speakers have increased activation in the right hemisphere since that is the area that plays an important role in language elements of melody and emotion.
- The higher the level of bilingual skills, the more overlap there is in their brain usage areas.
- The more meaningful the input, the better the interaction. Production should be meaning-based and focus of form should be tied to communication, and also teachers needs to know what to expect.
- Language acquisition is a slow process.

Lin Laoshi and Xu Laoshi gave a great demonstration in the afternoon. I can understand how nervous they were facing a group of outstanding students. It was nice for them to try out the lesson plan and practice the details. The demo helped them and me, as an observer, to realize things we missing and places that need to change. We always learn from others. The following is my summary from the observation:

- Slides should be clear and easy to read.
- Teacher needs to provide clear instructions/modeling for students and demonstrate the activity before letting students try on their own, especially in an immersion class.
- Teacher needs to allow students to repeatedly practice and examine whether students have gained the concepts.
- Try to create an authentic task, something that students are familiar with, to motivate students.

The best part of the day is working with my partners to prepare the lesson plan for the practicum. We discussed how to cover the vocabulary in our lesson. Everyone showed their ppt and strategies they planned to use in their classes. I was very impressed by my partners' teaching skills. While we were discussing, Jessica reminded us that we should think of our objectives, students outcome, not the vocabulary and grammar structure. That is right!!! So, we changed the way we planned and looked at what the objectives are and how to reach to the goals, and decided activities we can do to help students to be able to perform the objectives. BACKWARD DESIGN! Even though we were all very tired, but I had a big smile on my face because truly these theories we have learned can be applied.

6/28/2012 Thursday-- Day 4 self-reflection:

Today's topic, Integrated Performance Assessment, is a new concept for me. This is the first time I heard the term. I am very excited about using IPA.

IPA: To assess students through three different performance-integrated modes, in order of:

- interpretive → presentational → interpersonal (prototype) or
- interpretative → interpersonal → presentational (modified)

Dr. Tseng used different topics, media, and authentic materials to PUSH us to design assessment activities in three different modes. It is very hard to design the questions using appropriate wording and activities. After several practices, I got the concepts and it became easier to design.

My final exams usually include speaking, listening, reading, and writing. I try to use authentic pictures, video, newspaper, emails, and other materials. However, my questions are individually set up without a thematic topic. IPA provides a complete and interesting assessment and focus on performance. It is really eye-opening for me. I will use it in my teaching next year. But, it is really time consuming since I have to teach five different levels. I will try my best to implement this approach in my teaching.

6/29/2012 Friday-- Day 5 self-reflection:

It was an exciting night with strong winds and a power outage. Today we had male Tseng Laoshi to teach us about the smart phone and other computer technology applications. I learned how to use smart phone, palm, Wenlin software, and some web2 sites that we can use in Chinese teaching. These are all very useful pieces of information. Since our school does not allow using cell phones, I don't think I can use these devices in my class, but I will teach students to use these features if they need to. Zeng Laoshi is really an excellent teacher who works so hard to

collect many authentic materials and is willing to share his treasures with us. I really appreciate his generous offer.

Although we did not have power, we were creative and flexible to be able to perform our mini demo. I was the first person to teach. Without a projector, I could only show PowerPoint on my laptop. It was hard for students to see it. My five minutes went very fast, so I did not have time to show my student activity. I was hoping to do that activity and get some ideas about how it would work. I think if we can just use the mini demo to focus on showing our teaching delivery style and use rehearsal time to show our activities, that would be better.

I was happy to receive critiques from Tseng Laoshi. They helped me to see the mistakes I made unconsciously. I need to leave more time for students to answer and lead more communicative questions. It is awesome to have someone to critique my teaching from a constructive point of view. I learned a lot from watching other classmates. I learned that

- Games are fun but sometimes they are not a communicative activity. Try to make these games to be a communicative mode and students can practice their communicational skills.
- Use scaffolding to let students talk, and always leave enough time to allow students to answer.
- In an immersion program, you do not need to put English in the PowerPoint slides to reinforce students' learning. If the concept can be understood using body language or contextual clues, you do not need English to clarify.
- Try to encourage students to use longer sentences. Although it is natural to use just words or phrases to answer questions in real life, we should encourage students to say longer sentences for the sake of practice.
- For an activity, explain the activity first, and then give students the handout.
- Do not try to teach a long sentence with several new words at one time. We can break up the sentence into small chunks. After students master one piece, increase the length of the sentence.

7/3/2012 Tuesday—First Day Teaching self-reflection:

- **Before Class:** All the feedback from the mini demo and rehearsal were very helpful in preparing my teaching. It really helped me to reflect and build a better lesson plan. During the rehearsal, other teachers suggested that my “去长城” activity was too confusing (mixing people and groups) and too complicated (students might not have

strong math skills), so I changed to “waiter”. I also realized that I use too much English for instruction. The night before, I changed my slides to use simple pictures to explain the activities. I have great teammates who are very supportive and helpful. I enjoy all our discussion sections and have really learned a lot from them.

- **During Class:** I knew the content I needed to teach is very simple: family kinship, 的, 个, 两, and 这是, 谁。 Therefore, I decided to spend 20 minutes to review the content from the day before. I felt that students needed to learn to properly greet teachers in the first period, so they could say it each day for the next 8 days. While reviewing their numbers, I felt they needed more help with pronunciation, so I spent more time to correct them. After 20 minutes, I saw Taitian kept showing me her watch, and I knew I needed to move on. The rest of the teaching moved on smoothly, and students seemed to pick up the concepts easily. However, when I used student-centered activities for them to practice conversation, they did not understand what they needed to do. I did not give clear instructions. This is something I need to work on. There are some parts I should have let them do as pair work (less teacher-centered, more student-centered). I need to give students enough time to answer the questions. I also need to do more scaffolding to help students practice more. Dr. Tseng reminded me that, after an interpersonal activity, I need to have a presentational activity for students to complete the output.
- **After Class:** I loved this opportunity to practice using target language to teach. I have never taught using only Chinese. I was surprised that my students learned well. Now I have confidence that I can use immersion in my classes. I also enjoyed watching my teammates teach. Tiantian Laoshio’s teaching flowed smoothly, and her activities went well because she prepared well-designed activity sheets, so students knew what they needed to do.

7/7/2012 Saturday—Second Day Teaching self-reflection:

Topic: Visiting host family

Before Class: This unit covers visiting a host family. Our group first created a scenario and made a video to show a series of events: greeting, asking for a drink, and planning a tour trip. Our group first brainstormed what activities each period could do and how to make the transition from one period to the next smooth. The each teacher planned her own lesson and then presented to the group and received support and suggestions from other teammates. Our rehearsal also received very valuable criticism. I realized that my activities again were too complicated, and so I had to change to a different plan.

During Class: Although the students seemed to have fun today, I do not think I taught well today. Here are my reflections:

1. More student output: Instead of asking students individually what they wanted to drink, I should have let the students ask each other (pair work) to generate more student outcome.
2. More communicative drills than meaningful drills: when students sang the song, I used the drinks in their hands as the answers. I should have let them ask each other and bring the correct drink to their partners. When designing an activity, I should always think how to make the drill in a communicative mode. This is the most important thing I have learned in this program.
3. Confirmation: After each student-centered activity, I need to check students to see whether they learn correctly. For example, after pair work, I can ask a group of students to come up and repeat the activity (interpersonal) or have one student present their discussion (presentational).
4. Detail instruction: Some of the instructions are not clear, so students do not know the objective of the activity (game). Not being able to use English to write the instructions is really difficult. My PowerPoint did not have any English this time, and students were confused and did not know what to do. One student asked me what the objectives were when they were playing “have or not have a drink”. This is a complicated activity. I should write the instructions clearly on paper so they know what they should do.
5. We had an accident in my class. I dropped Cokes and Sprites, so when I opened the bottles, they exploded. I made a mess, but the students were very excited.

Using authentic materials really helps students to get the ideas. I used real drinks for students, which got them excited. They knew what they liked to drink, so they quickly answered my question: 你要喝什么? . When students played the restaurant drink order game, I did not have enough time. Otherwise, I should have let the waiter prepare the drinks.

I reviewed the previous lesson “谁啊，是我，欢迎，请进，请坐” by asking my students to stay outside and come in one by one to ask questions. Students seemed to get the ideas but did not remember how to say it. It was just a way for them to review and practice.

After Class: Hong Laoshi is very good at scaffolding. She always asked meaningful communicative questions to help students practice the language. She also always reminds us to think of the objectives. Instead of trying to teach all the vocabulary, I should design the activities according to what meaningful outcome I would like to our students to perform. Use pretty of time for scaffolding. Make sure students understand it then move on to students center

activity. After the student center activity, a student interpersonal demo or presentation should be followed to check students' learning.

7/10/2012 Tuesday—Third Day Teaching self-reflection:

Topic: Shopping in Beijing

Before Class: This time we cooperated with the other team since we taught exactly the same content. Nai-I and I worked together, which saved a lot of time and work. I prepared the slides, and she prepared the worksheets, which was highly effective. Our part was shopping for clothes. We prepared a video to show shopping and bargaining. The lesson we plan was according to the video conversation, and we hoped to, step by step, lead students to reach the goal.

During Class:

1. Wisely choose activity to avoid chaos: I got great feedback from Tseng Laoshi and YaChing. They pointed out some of my teaching techniques can be improved. Tseng Laoshi suggested that for the bargain and buying activities, instead of using real clothes, I can just use pictures for students to pick. That way, students don't have to get up and go to the front. It will save time and the class won't be chaotic. Good point.
2. Take your time and remain calm: Watching my own video, I feel my teaching pace is too fast and too busy, with too much body language and facial expression. I should be calmer and move at a slower pace (不急不徐). I think maybe watching the time go by so fast made me want to speed up. I will remind myself next time to slow down and take time to wait for students' replies and take time to help them practice.
3. More scaffolding and communicative drills: I designed three activities: information gap, gold fish, and bargaining role play. I led them through the sides and assumed they knew the content and how to ask/answer. However, after watching the video, I found out that they were confused about what they should say and kept looking at the screen to check their lines. I should use plenty of time for scaffolding to make sure they understand the concept before they do the activity. I felt pressure to finish all the activities, so I was in a hurry and pushed the students to jump into something that they did not quite understand.
4. Time management: The activities I designed took longer than I expected, so I had to cut the activities and leave them unfinished. I should design simpler activities to allow students to complete the tasks.

After Class: Although students seemed to have fun and were able to bargain with me, I don't think I taught well today. In order to finish all the activities, I did not have enough scaffolding to

prepare my students for the activities. Next time, I should let students watch the video first to get an idea what this lesson is about.

Even though I have taught Chinese for six years and learned 5Cs and 3 modes many times, this is the first time I really put what I have learned into practice. It makes me realize what an effective Chinese teacher should do:

1. Use only target language in class to provide a meaningful learning environment
2. Teach language in a context base using more communicative drills.
3. Provide students enough practice (12 times at least), not through mechanical drill, but in a communicative and meaningful situation.
4. Evaluate students using IPA (Integrated Performance Assessment) through context and task bases.

Through practicum and reflection, I realized my teaching “blind spots”. After this three-week training, I feel more confidence in presenting my teaching in a more effective way. I will remind myself to use more target language and scaffolding to help students learn using communicative drills in a meaningful setting. I will also switch my teaching style to be a student-centered style with task-based and performance-based activities.

I really appreciate the opportunity to attend Startalk program and be able to build a strong foundation of teaching Chinese as second language. I specially want to express my gratitude to Dr. Tseng and all other teachers for their critiques and support to make me a better teacher.