Selected Self-Reflections

Nai-I H. Finney 胡乃懿

Day 1 Reflection-June 26, 2012

There are various second-language teaching theories in the educational field. Foreign language teachers are trying to find the best practices for teaching their students. I am one of the teachers, and I would like to give some reflections on chapters 7 & 8 of *推動專業化的 AP 中文教學--大學二年級成功教學模式* (Miao-fen Tseng, 2007) and today's workshop.

The reading's practicality inspires me the most. First, the ample activities for four skills provide me ideas for the coming year's Chinese II class. Specially "Direct Teaching of Speaking" and "Word Cards and Sentences Cards" (p.239) can help my students work from sentences to paragraphs. Also, the sample lesson plans from chapter 8 can be used when I have Chinese III and IV.

Secondly, the author is aware of the challenges and questions that teachers might have. For example, when discussing the importance of using authentic materials (p.229-234), she wisely advises new teachers to collect the materials gradually, instead of spending a mass of time gathering them all at once. Her suggestion is very practical and makes using authentic material seem feasible for me now.

Thirdly, the author offers the most effective practices from her own experience. Dr. Tseng asserts that the most efficient way to teach foreign languages is to help students to use structures/grammars without explaining grammar rules. However, when she mentions the standard "comparing languages," she lists some sentence structures with which it is better to compare the Chinese and English first, and then practice with communicative drills (p.258-261). This section also indicates that I can teach the rest of structures without comparing languages.

Today's workshop gave me a great opportunity to reflect on my teaching from last year. I had already learned most of the methods from my graduate courses; however, I did not apply them well to my teaching. Sometimes, I did not know how to apply them, and sometimes, I was so tired of teaching that I didn't have energy to make changes. My brain is spinning after today's workshop, because I am thinking about how to incorporate a more communicative approach into my lesson plans and how to use only Chinese in my class. I will be working on putting five standards in my lesson plans and gathering/using authentic materials. There are many details for me to plan out in MY OWN situation. Emotionally, I could see passion in other teachers' eyes, which encouraged me to improve my own teaching.

The above are my thoughts about chapters 7 & 8 and today's discussion. I got many ideas for activities, how to use authentic materials, and how to apply the best practices. I

gained a lot, so I am hopeful, because I know that I'm on my way to being a better teacher.

Day2 Reflection-June 27, 2012

The reading, Epilogue: Implications for Teaching selected *from Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition* (Van Patten, 2002), corresponds strongly to today's workshop.

1. The more (meaning-based) input, the better.

Foreign language teachers should use total immersion and a communicative approach so students can get more input and generate output. When teachers use target languages only, students will naturally receive more input, but the input should be comprehensible to students so that the input is valid. Communicative approach helps students produce meaningful output, which reinforces what they have learned more than if they merely have mechanical output. According to the reading, teachers should also teach vocabulary in a meaningful way, because meaningful input engages learners more than mechanical input. I agree with the point of view from this reading and today's lecture. However, I am still learning how to put this idea into practice. I am really looking forward to Alice and Yaching's demonstration in a few days.

2. The more interaction, the better.

Here, the interaction is between instructors and students, and it should be communicative, meaning that students' responses will be unpredictable and meaningful. Also, teachers should deliver classes focusing on both forms and meanings, which together constitute FORM as defined by Long (1998). Focusing only on forms generally leads any conversation to a dead-end, because it stifles students' interest; more importantly, it is not likely to happen in natural conversation. Therefore, the conversations focusing on FORM will create authentic interaction. I think the more communicative interaction there is in a foreign language class, the more students will be prepared for genuine conversation with native speakers. Therefore, I would really like to have more communicative interaction in my class.

3. All learner production should be meaning-based (communicative).

Students will be more engaged if class is comprised of students using the target language to communicate their thoughts than if class is merely mechanical repetition. Tasks-Based Language Teaching (TBLB) is a useful approach for building class around communicative activities. Because the tasks require students to convey their ideas, students must figure out how to use appropriate forms (grammatical structures) to carry their meanings. Learners can consult various language resources by themselves while completing their tasks. However, learners who have limited language abilities generally need more guidance from the instructor to complete the tasks. In response, teachers can provide scaffolding to direct structured output (p.109, Patten, 2002). I think the tasks create purpose for students to use the target language, so TBLB should be a practical and effective way for students to practice/learn the language. I am thankful that professor Tseng shared her activities. These high-quality tasks are great examples for me. I would like to incorporate more tasks in my Chinese classes.

4. Focus on form (grammar) should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication.

The "form" here refers the "forms" (i.e. grammatical structures) as defined by Michael Long (1998). In Long's category, TBLB and Content-based Language Teaching focus on "form," which means grammar and meaning together. When students make grammatical mistakes (or mistakes in general) in conversation, teachers can use recasting to give correct input. In this way, the conversation between teachers and students will not be interrupted by the correction; however, the mistakes will still be corrected. I think that point #4 goes back to the core of learning languages—communication. Grammar is a tool to convey ideas more accurately and clearly. But without any meaning, language with correct grammar could be nonsense noise.

5. We should watch out for what we expect of learners.

After talking about forms and meanings, let's go back to day-by-day teaching in the classroom. Teachers should be aware of students' abilities and give students tasks of appropriate difficulty. Setting appropriate expectations is vital in teaching. Currently, using authentic materials is a trend for foreign language teaching, but sometimes these materials are too overwhelming for students. Therefore, when using authentic materials, teachers should design tasks to fit learners' abilities. If teachers have the right expectations for students, then students will be able to achieve, and to enjoy their achievement. It will take some time and experimentation for me to set suitable expectations in teaching. I know that I will need time to get familiar with my students and to identify their gaps in knowledge.

Day3 Reflection-June 28, 2012

Reading Commentary
After reading "How to Learn Teaching Techniques from Classroom Observation (Liang, 2008)," I learned some new information and found some aspects upon which I can improve.

First, there is a new thing for me about teachers' position. Liang mentions that when teachers want students to focus on the lecture, teachers should stand up to project their authority. However, when teachers want students to discuss and express their ideas, teachers should perhaps sit down in order to make students feel that they can interact with their teachers as equals. I have always believed that I, as a teacher, should stand and circulate in the class all the time, so my students know that I am present and attentive. Now I realize that good teachers can use both sitting and standing to fulfill their teaching objectives.

Next, I would like to work on the time management. There are various questions in this article for class observers, and I also view these questions as reflective questions for educators. Therefore, I asked myself these questions, according to my previous teaching. I concluded that I need to make numerous changes, but I might not be able to correct everything at the same time. I would like to set one goal that I can focus on: time management. I like to close every lesson with a review, but I was not able to do this consistently last semester, because I did not control my use of class time and rarely allotted enough time for a solid close.

In conclusion, I want to make better use of my physical image (i.e. standing or sitting) to help reach my teaching goals. I also want control class time more tightly so that I can establish a review/closure routine in my lessons.

Workshop Reflection
Dr. Ferree's workshop "Brains and Second Language Acquisition" provided us several practical ideas and applications for our future teaching. I list what I learned below:

1. Students can memorize words better while processing words meaningfully rather than mechanically. This is because when people process meanings, their brains stimulate more pathways and neuron sets, aiding recall.

2. It takes at least twelve repetitions before one "knows" a word. As a teacher, I should encourage students to use new words meaningfully at least 12 times, so that they will truly know the words.

3. Students and teachers may view the world differently due to differences in culture, age, and life experience. Therefore, I should observe/learn students' interests, and use these to motivate and relate to them.

4. When presenting characters, I should use one color for Chinese and pinyin and another color for English definitions.

5. I will use the activity Dr. Ferree led in class to help my students learn new words meaningfully. I will give a small group of students a few new words, and they can draw a picture and then share a story using the new words.

Day 5 Reflection-June 30, 2012

Workshop about Technology

I learned of several tools that I could use in my Chinese class in the future. Mr. Zeng shared a lot of new information about technology. Since the available technology in my school district is relatively scarce and a little old, I have not spent time figuring out how to use much technology in my class. I usually use Power Point, Youtube, and Quizlet. During the workshop, I discovered that there are actually many web resources I can use FOR my teaching. I might not be able to use those tools IN my class, but I can use them for preparing materials or other purposes. For example, 南極星 would be a great tool for preparing a word list when I am using an authentic text. Second, Voki could be used as a tool for oral presentation (this idea is from Mrs. Broadstock 姜老師). Third, Polleverywhere can be used as an assessment or presentational tool, whereby students can give their feedback by texting! Technology should not be used only for fun; it should be applied in class for teaching/learning purposes. I need to plan how to use those software and websites to enhance my teaching.

Reflection on the mini-demo

1. Words->Phrases / Short sentences->Long sentences: When introducing new words and structures, teachers should present words first, phrases second, and then sentences. Students find it too challenging if teachers start teaching with long sentences and a lot of new words.

2. **Explain before giving handouts**: Teachers should give handouts/worksheets after they explain/model what students are expected to do for an activity. This way, students can focus on a teacher's modeling/explanation, instead of being distracted by reading the handouts.

3. Communicative>Meaningful>Mechanic drills: When drilling students, teachers should favor communicative drills. If it is impossible or difficult to apply communicative drills, then teachers can use meaningful drills. Mechanical drills should be avoided in class. This presents two difficulties for me. First, I have gotten so used to mechanical drills, so it will take focused effort to change my behavior. Second, sometimes I cannot come up with ideas for communicative activities.

Reflection on My First Teaching Practice-July 3, 2012

There are many aspects upon which I can improve, but I would like to focus on two of them: better scaffolding, and moving from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction.

First, I didn't scaffold well enough. From now on, I should cut my material into the smallest elements and then give students the opportunity to practice each element before I add a new one. For example, after teaching the names of family members, I introduced the possessive case "的," and then I had a student-centered activity. At that time, students showed me their "I-am-confused" faces. Now I know that I should let students practice right after I teach family members, and then move on to the next grammar point. Also, when having communicative drills/activities, I should always provide the sentence structures, especially for novice level students. Otherwise, students will not know what I expect them to do.

Second, I should talk less and let students perform more. This problem is rooted in poor scaffolding. When students did not understand my instruction, I tried to explain more or demonstrate slower. Also, I hesitated to do presentational tasks after their interpersonal activities, because I found that they did not meet my expectations while they were doing interpersonal activities. Therefore, they had even fewer tasks, and I just talked more. If I can use tools to effectively convey my material and scaffold well enough, then students should be able to perform their tasks with greater ease and a sense of accomplishment.

For the next class, I should focus on my scaffolding structures and add more student-centered activities.

Reflection on My Third Teaching Practice-July 10, 2012

I was teaching the 3rd (last) hour for Day 7 (Shopping). Overall, students reached their learning objectives, and they could perform what we expected. However, there are still some improvements that I could make. My reflections on three aspects are as follows:

With respect to my delivery, I made an obvious mistake: I uttered an "OK" in class, which should be avoided. Rather, I should only use the target language in a total immersion classroom. Also, Ms. Lin reminded me that I looked very serious during the first half of the class. I should smile more so students feel more comfortable speaking Chinese. In addition, I should have practiced with my partners, so that we could model the activities more smoothly.

With respect to activity arrangement, I think the shopping video should have been played at the beginning of the lesson and used as an introduction to the lesson. I used the video as a model for the last summative activity (a shopping skit). However, we did not have enough time to work on the skit, so I cut off the whole activity, including the video. Ms. Lin and Dr. Tseng told me that I should play the video, so I did that, after the class was dismissed. Later, I pondered the arrangement of my lesson, and decided that the lesson would be more efficient and meaningful to students if they knew what the final product would be.

I strongly realized the benefit of student-centered activities today. When the students were doing teacher-centered mechanical/meaningful drills, I could not tell how well they performed individually, because all the students responded together. For example, they could say $200 (liǎng bǎi kuài) correctly with me, but many students said "èr bǎi kuài " when they were doing the information gap activity with each other. As I observed the different groups, I was able to correct them individually. The student-centered activity gave me a clearer and more accurate picture of students' progress, and allowed me to correct them more effectively.

In conclusion, I can improve my delivery and the arrangement of the lesson. Also, student-centered activities should be applied in language class as many times as possible.