

Selected Daily Reflections

6/21

This morning, our first warm-up assignment discussion was quite an eye opening. I've heard and read a lot of theories but to actually identify the theories based on what the demo film has shown us, it's really interesting.

Today, Dr. Tseng taught us a lot; she combined theories and practical examples to show us how can one applies the learning and transfer it to the teaching. We were shown 11 statements to help us renew and review our knowledge of the 5Cs and 10 statements of the 3 modes. The second part of this morning topic was "Linguafolio" can-do statements. They were used as ACTFL guidelines nowadays. I actually never know what the can-do statements do to students but I did today. I found them very effective when it involved lesson plans design.

Tseng laoshi has a very effective ways when it comes to teach high school and college students Chinese. She used flash cards, pictures, or visual method to teach. She mentioned a few methods that she uses in her classroom. 学习环境, 温故知新, 借用肢体语言, 结合生活, 现学现用, 通过例子, 举一反三, 等等。 A teacher can use mostly pictures to teach Chinese and you can even sing or play song that's easy for student to sing along. You don't need to speak much of English, or even speak a word of English, or worry about students won't understand because by using body language its effective enough for them to follow along. As for "attention getter" the samples include music, clapping hands, or using microphone so the students will not have opportunities to zone out.

In the afternoon, we watched a demo provided by one of our own and we got to know her first hand teaching methods. I thought it's very effective that we had the opportunities to learn from our peers. Everyone was so willing to share their experiences and thoughts that I did learn a lot today as a matter of fact. Dr. Tseng's repeating sentence structures was very good in getting students to speak a certain pattern of phrases. I especially like the teacher-student center interchange action though it's quite a fast pace.

Reading Reflection

Epilogue: Implications for Teaching selected from Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition, by Van Pattern, 2002

The more input, the better. This first implication reminds me of what Dr. Tseng has shown us this afternoon when she showed us the piece of a girl who's from China was interviewed by Tseng Laoshi. She then put up a few questions to ask her students of what they remembered in the film about the Chinese college student who transferred from China to UVa. It's a memory test but it also tested students' vocabulary abilities.

The more interaction, the better. Here we read a few very good and bad examples that provided us with how teacher guided students to get their input or not getting their input. The dynamics between teacher and the students is quite important. Here we learned what a teacher can do to provoke the interactions among students so their acquisition became evident in their conversations with the teacher.

All learner production should be meaning-based, or communicative. This implication coincided of what we learned today in the class. There are mechanical, meaningful, and communicative drills. The author provided us an example of how students produced output to become one another's input. They had a lot of interaction going on among themselves though not a lot with the instructor.

Focus on form (or grammar instruction) should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication. This implication fits what I know best. I make mistakes like this one a lot of times when it comes to speak English. I noticed my colleagues will correct me subtly without pointed it out to me just like when they talk to their children at home. We as an L2 learner; no matter how good we are at speaking English we still make mistakes. Same goes with students learning Chinese or Spanish. The form is more important than to interrupt the student's train of thoughts. Recast is a factor that we should keep in our teaching.

We should watch out for what we expect of learners. We think of the elements of learning a new language is to produce the outcome-to speak. We expect our students to speak the language we teach them.

June 23, 2011

Today's lecture was presented by Natasha Pierce. She started the class by talking about Authentic Materials and how we as Chinese teachers could incorporate the "authentic materials" into our lesson plans. She asked us that as teachers, what obstacles we might encounter when presenting or using the materials in the class which sparked interesting discussions.

I especially appreciate her painstaking efforts in collecting all the materials and showed us what she did in her classes. I thought her ideas were very good tasks for students to do because they engaged their attentions and provided them with many speaking opportunities. For example, using a couple of pages from a comic book or let students draw and write a comic piece at the same time will do. She also showed us where to get video clips or short films or songs as supplements to encourage students' creative sides on designing a menu, act out a play, or read a lyric. Her lessons contained most of the 5C elements and 3 modes. Many thanks to Natasha for presenting us with a wealth of Mandarin teaching knowledge as well as a preview opportunity for us to get together to talk about what our practicum should be like the next 2 weeks.

This afternoon, Tseng Laoshi wanted us to practice how to give instructions by designing a pedagogical task lesson using measure words and preposition/noun. It's a scaffolding technique by building up students' comfortable level to enhance their speaking abilities. Naichi's helpful insights also helped us during our group discussion.

Question and Answer style, such as "what did you do last weekend?" is a teacher-led task. I found it very useful and helpful in terms of helping/forcing students to focus on what to say. It's a communicative way to make students to speak the target language on what they did at their spare time. The TBLT did cause a heated discussion in the middle of the diagram showing. I found one of the exercises was particular interesting to do even for us as teachers (we are also students). It's to identify various activities to see if they were sedentary or active. That was a great student centered task that I could adopt and use in my own class to inspire students to talk more.

I would like to say I gain and renew a lot of what I know and don't know as days go by. It's amazing how Dr. Tseng, Natasha, and Naichi have done so far and once again, thank you all.

6/24

A tech savvy morning!!

What an interesting day to learn the technology world in Chinese teaching/learning. Mr. Zeng taught and showed us this morning that there are many tools out there for second language teaching and learning. He introduced palm pilots and desk top writing pad as the ones among many tech instruments for teachers and students to use. I thought the desk top pad was sensational and will serve as the applicative device for learners of second language.

GoChinese is a remarkable website to implement, acquire, and reinforce Chinese learning. I'd love to persuade my supervisor to purchase the usage right for our students to use the website. It is a very good accessory for both the teachers and students. Thanks to Mr. Zeng for his generous allowance and spare us of the oblivious of the tech world.

Time for/to TPRS!

Ms. Helen Small was our afternoon instructor for the TPRS. I've encountered TPR in the past while attending other teaching programs. I was impressed enough that I applied the method that year in my class right after the program. But, this afternoon's session opened my eyes even more. Why? Here is what I think.

We did a fun test run outside in the commons so we could have more room to maneuver and act out the story. Helen taught us how to sound out the German words by doing the actions at the same time. We recited, memorized, visualized, entangled (in a good way) in the story she wanted us to listen and perform the "Cat and the Mouse family." I was mesmerized because it was such a gaiety early afternoon! I have a heart for learning new languages thus Ms. Small's presentation was one I could appreciate. At the end, we were all 'Glücklich' all the way back to our classroom.

It's intriguing to know how human brain work that enables us to comprehend new vocabs, phrases, and simple sentences of a new language in such a short time. Overall, I felt it's another day of harvest.

6/25

Teaching Demos/ the mini practicum

We used this whole morning to do teaching demos with all 5 groups. We have all worked really hard last night and into the wee hours. We didn't take it lightly even though it's just a 10 minutes demo teaching. Of course, this morning proved it's hard to keep it under 10 minutes. Every group had so much to share along with so many good activities, tasks, games, etc. that we could learn from.

I jotted down some important notes according to Tseng, Naichi, and Natasha Laoshi men in regards to what we should aware of when teaching the novice high school students. I'd like to share my notes with everyone so we can all do a better job.

1. Give as much time to students as possible to practice/speak the target language
2. A performer-based method will be ideal to practice
3. A comprehensive input is great for students to understand what to do; model first when assigning students tasks or activities
4. Be as clear as possible when pronouncing words or phrases
5. Show a short film/clip if the task will be complicated for the novice level
6. Watch out for sensitive issue when referring to students body size, parents, or body touch
7. Don't finger point students; instead, use hand gestures to avoid cultural issue
8. Always use yourself as example before pair or single out students.

Dr. Tseng, Shi Laoshi, and Ms. Pierce all had very good advises for us to introspect and reflect on what we could do to revise our teaching plans. It's easy to be a critic when observing what others didn't do well but, it's not easy to see through one's own shortcomings. It serves to have fellow teachers to look at our own teaching and to hear what they had to say.

Today's demo ease our minds and the anxiety surrounding the next two weeks' practicum. I truly appreciate this early opportunity for letting us practice before we step up to the stage.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Zeng for what he shared with us this afternoon. He's so gracious to instruct us how to use the GoChinese! Web site and other devices he is currently using with his own students and the affects. He took his time answering our questions and tirelessly assisting our requests.

6/30 First Day teaching reflection

Think back of how I taught this morning in the class there were many aspects that I need to reflect on and seek improvement. I tried very hard to apply the theories that I learned from last week but still couldn't maneuver the process as well as I like it to be.

Both Tseng and Shi Laoshi along with other teachers gave me many beneficial critics yesterday afternoon (made me wanted to cry, almost) and again, in the hotel cafeteria last night which were much appreciated. I realized the critics from my colleagues are good for me to learn and grow as a student while take in of all that I can and to become a better Mandarin teacher of tomorrow.

Our team worked very hard into the wee hours. Many good ideas were able to be carried out into the class this morning although the outcome wasn't ideal.

I knew that I should not assume students' proficiency level just because they have homework every day. I wasn't able to connect the 2nd hour teaching with the previous day's lesson and found the students were frustrated when they didn't remember the vocabularies they learned the previous day. I learned that it's important the first one up needs to review the following day. I need to have clear gestures with enunciation so as not to confuse students.

There is a dot cam up in the front which I didn't make a good use of it. I also didn't do the modeling well enough even though I rehearsed and jotted down notes last night according to the slides I prepared.

When doing introspection of how I did today and to estimate how much time was spent on providing student centered activities; honestly, I didn't count the minutes. I know there is still room for me to improve along with how to design the contents to fit students cognitively and mentally for them to acquire the language. I need to think from students' perspectives to make my instructions as clear as possible such as if I speak loud enough, did my slides make sense to them, always remember we need to get output from the students, and to help them achieve the learning objectives of the day.

7/2 Second practicum reflection: Dining in a Chinese restaurant

Wow!! What a different experience I've gone through between 2 classes. I felt lousy the first day but today, my confidence was up again. Today really was my "A Ha" moment because I understand that much more in regards to why teachers need to have theory based lesson plans when design a content. I designed today's lesson focusing on more student-centered tasks which increased their language output innumerable in comparison to what I had done on my day 1's lesson.

My demerits or rather the insufficiency of my teaching today were that I rushed a bit due to time constrain so the tempo of interaction was amiss in the beginning. Ming Laoshi said the allotment of my presence encourage the students to participate so they were engaged on "repeat after me" tactic. I know I need to imprint that suggestion of providing more interesting exchange when interact with students.

I started the last to do a general review on today's lesson for period 1 & 2 and found that if the students didn't understand certain part of the lesson they continue to think about it which increased their anxiety thinking they need to master the new vocabs or sentence structures in such a short time. I then needed to explain the questions the students have when they asked it in English when both parties knew English wasn't allowed to be spoken in class. The modeling would be the next component to improve. I harbored on non verbal explanation by implementing English explanation so students apprehended what I wanted to convey without me breaking the rule- speak English in class.

My accomplishment today was I carried out the core task in a more specific way so student outcome was more ideal, as well. I didn't think I ignored any student so there's no silent moment when tasks or activities were taking place during the class period. Our team tried to enlighten the students by providing authentic materials so they feel that much closer to China. I also make sure every student opened their mouth to talk and practice so they not only had language input but output as well.

After the second date's teaching I have gotten more than a glimpse of how to plan, design, and teach. I am optimal these two classes receive the best lessons from all the teachers.

7/7 Third Practicum Reflection, July 7th

I must say what a great way to wrap up the last of the practicum day with the students perform in Chinese! My teammates and I planned our instructions carefully in order to include all the themes Gugong and Changcheng students have learned the past 8 days. Our plan was to have the students wrote up their own scripts and act it out at the beginning of the 3rd period.

The purpose behind it was for them to review what they learned and applied the practical part, speaking and listening, into the action through oral and physical performance. They were so excited about their assignment; what a wonderful, exuberant, and fun bunch! As predicted, the result was well beyond our expectation. We saw all the students wrote up their scripts, rehearsed, and finalized their rehearsals. They took the team work seriously and wanted to show everyone what they could do after 24 hours of learning.

Our group met up and discussed about how to put instructions together for the students with great consideration of what they have learned in mind before instructions were put together. We need to make the guidelines very clear to them so they could conjure up their scripts and be creative.

I knew I am definitely a changed person after the 3-week training course. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on what I have acquired during the time here. I accept that I am not an experienced teacher and I acknowledge the existence of it. This acknowledgment allows me to put things in perspective and gives a sense of direction.

I need to know clearly what I want to give students each time before I step into the classroom and be specific as to outline practical steps for implementation. At the same time, I must be able to adapt to any unforeseen changes such as when one task doesn't work out there's always a back up activity I can use instead. Stubbornness is different from resilience, so be flexible about lesson plans without losing sight of the big picture.

When I take the practical steps I can divide the learning objectives into a set of smaller goals and take realistic steps. This will enable me to steer clear of frustration. Also, recognize and celebrate every success of students, regardless of how insignificant it may be.

A teacher should keep reassessing the lesson plans often and make relevant changes in order to avoid stagnation. It is also important to assess and reassess students from time to time as it might be time to help them to set their personal goals to reach higher level.

I can now go back to Wisconsin and apply the techniques I learn in my own classrooms and exchange ideas with my new colleagues this fall about teaching American students Chinese using the target language with good theories based tasks.

