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#1

When I applied for the 2018 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy, I had a single picture of a student and the student's needs in mind. After the 2-day online training, I closed my eyes and saw the extended image of all students vying for my attention.

Compare to the flimsy student survey I hand out on the first day of school, the amount of student information in Collab was mind-boggling. Weeks before the first online class, their background, personality, learning style, habits, language proficiency...etc. have all been collected, analyzed into placement and groups. The future students whom I never met have begun to take up spaces in my heart.

The more we know about our students, the better we are able to differentiate instruction to achieve learning objectives and maximize language output. In "Exploring New Directions" Dr. Fu demonstrates how to successfully design a lesson in a 3-level class with a well-established routine, different level contents, all within a common theme. The end of the video reflects the rich language output, in-depth presentations, and the profound understanding of cultural perspectives. Dr. Fu "incorporates students' personal interests to help shape their learning. This both motivates students and creates opportunities for comparisons between Chinese language and culture and the dominant language and cultural heritage of the students."

Although research has shown the significant benefits of using the target language in a classroom, I always shy away from it once students start to complain or drop out of Chinese and choose Spanish instead.

I was amazed at Cai Laoshi's F2F video. I've taught the same lesson for years, yet my students' language output paled in comparison to Cai Laoshi's. It seemed that Cai Laoshi only prepared for few Powerpoints, but her objectives were fully fulfilled, and her students had almost "0" problem understanding her. I know it took a lot of planning, but how did she start? I really want to learn from her.

In a teacher training, the trainer asked a kindergarten teacher why she chose to teach "三輪車跑得快". The teacher's reasons were to teach numbers, transportations, and the song. The trainer questioned, "What's the big picture? Why does the old lady pay one dollar instead of the 50 cents the driver asks for?" What is the enduring understanding, how do we know if students get it, what knowledge and skills do students need?

Lin Laoshi and Cai Laoshi's online teaching videos clearly applied the backward design with ACTFL's five Cs embedded. They presented attainable objectives at the beginning and taught from vocabulary to sentences to dialogue. They constantly paused to check for understanding with mini-assessments to ensure the progression of the lesson. Their questions were meaningful, relevant, thought-provoking, and age-appropriate. Their calm, soothing voice and the warm friendly smile took away the fear of learning a new language and encouraged them to press on. They both looked effortless, but we knew how much time they'd spent getting ready for that 45 minutes student-centered lesson. They both demonstrated how creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills could be successfully implemented and mastered.

#3

The second-week training was mainly about the technological infrastructure which played a critical role in online teaching. To ensure a quality learning experience and prevent any potential mishap, Gao Laoshi gave us a step-by-step walk-through of both Zoom and Nearpod which was a well-designed platform for learning the communicative modes. She also compiled a detailed list of preparations which included students, Powerpoints, computers, environments, and myself. It was very different from my face-to-face class where I didn't have to remind them of different time zones, create user-friendly links, rely solely upon Powerpoints and internet of course. Most importantly, exam the system thoroughly at the earliest possible time. On the Group 1B teaching video, it took the first 4 minutes to connect participants and another 9 minutes tried watching music videos; that reminded me of the seriousness of being prepared. Thanks to all the unsung heroes who'd been working behind the scenes diligently to make our training as seamless as possible. Where at school, we've had technical issues while having class in the computer lab, but we were able to switch mode, turn high tech to low tech, or a no-tech paper and pencil day.

A successful online program must have a high-quality course content just like the face-to-face class. A good lesson begins with the backward design; it is structured, standard based, learner-centered, and use the target language.

Gao Laoshi taught us how to prepare for the immediate perimeter and dress for success. She also provided us with a plethora of online platforms and useful apps which was really an eye-opener. I spent a lot of time exploring but only visited a few. I was amazed at Google Hangouts' overabundant educational functions. I also signed up free accounts for future usage.

Another productive week!

#5

Today's lesson was as flavorful as last night's dinner.

Tseng Laoshi began the first day with words of wisdom to set the tone for the remaining 3-week journey. She encouraged us to stay positive and brave the challenges. Years of teaching experience made her a pioneer and a prolific writer. Thanks for the gifts! Two weeks of preparation paved the way for our 10-day online teaching. Two more days before rubber meets the road; I am far from ready.

Yoyo guided us through Canvas to learn about students' learning style, level of proficiency, social media, preview assignments, and homework. This helpful information will direct and redirect our course of instruction. Lin Laoshi and Cai Laoshi demonstrated ways to carefully choose attainable learning objectives for each lesson and a detailed checklist to evaluate teaching videos.

The highlight of today's class was to watch and discuss our mini teaching demos with Gao Laoshi. What're the best practices? I admit I had very little ideas about how to critique the wonderfully made videos. I wish I was as calm, funny, smooth as my classmates. Listening and watching my team, I slowly followed how to compare with the checklist and provide constructive feedback. Until two weeks ago, I taught in my old "reading teacher" hat. Learner-centered

means to leave Wang Peng, Li You in their textbook and bring students into focus. Performance-based assessment can't assess unless students perform meaningfully. Although I only carry out the third stage of backward design, it still seems like a monumental task.

"Knowledge is of no value unless you put into practice." With enough practice, it will become a habit. I am an experienced classroom teacher, but I feel like a rookie again. My son suggested a logical progression and firm voice, but I know my demo needs a lot of help...haha. I pray that teachers will have the patience to at least finish watching it and give me their constructive criticism.

#6

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO, started off the day by sharing how her resilience helped her through the darkest days of her life. I remembered thinking, this might just be my darkest day being looked inside out under a microscope with nowhere to hide.

Hooray, Cai Laoshi shared her first-day ppt with us!

Our mini demos were carefully evaluated by groups and individuals. My group led by Gao Laoshi huddled together to review and compare notes from our homework of watching mini teaching demos. I left my room hastily after the fire scare not knowing I'd grabbed the wrong notepad. Fortunately, I found notes taken from previous afternoon, with Gao Laoshi's help I delivered my observation and gave constructive feedback. Clearly, most of us were amateurs in online teaching, but all of us completed the video assignment. That alone displayed the true grit.

Who would have thought that my grainy video would bring out the best of critiques? These two teachers must have spent agonizing hours watching the monotonous lesson, pausing and rewinding to script down every word we said. Amazingly, they left no stone unturned. Questions and responses were analyzed repeated to compile an observation checklist of recorded time, evidence, and percentage. In addition, the question and response time were further calculated and classified into hierarchical order and pie charts. I had never seen anything quite like it, I was ecstatic! Their presentation was out of this world! Zhao Lin Laoshi and Feng Ying Laoshi deserved an Oscar for Movie Reviews. How could anyone top that!

#7

I had been looking for a different approach to my outdated first day of school activity. Ms. Murphy-Judy's workshop enabled me to use data to plan for engaging and thoughtful lessons. Anthony's medication was relaxing and very interesting. My tense body was happy to hibernate for a few precious minutes. The opening went well. Students' self-introduction videos revealed a lot about their young lives but there's nothing more exciting than finally talking to the 4 lovely students online. Session I and II were different in many ways yet just as pleasant and cheerful.

It's my privilege to have worked with an energetic, experienced, intelligent, vibrant, and thoughtful group of educators. I could feel the electrified ideas busily bouncing back and forth to form a skeleton with key objectives. Subgroups took aim on adopted objectives and painstakingly picked on each other's brain before a draft was produced. What would most likely to have taken others a week to create, our group put together a lesson with a storyline and abundant authentic materials together in just a few hours. Being the only Chinese teacher at the school, this experience is priceless! How I wish I could have a team to work with back home. The best I can do is to enjoy and learn from each of them. Thanks to Group One!

#8

My recorded video was hard to watch. I was both over-prepared and under-prepared.

I was happily surprised by Group F's outstanding performance at the opening. I made changes

to the Team One Group Powerpoints, but I had a hard time connecting the dots. I found myself still modifying the Group Powerpoints minutes before class began. Never felt so unprepared.

Not all students had done their preview assignments, those who came empty handed were significantly behind. I was expecting the first lesson to glide smoothly but when it didn't, I became nervous. In order to meet the learning objectives, I needed to differentiate the content, process, and product. Tseng Laoshi suggested having Yuyang contact those who needed additional help to attend afternoon tutorial. Although everyone was expected to have come prepared, these students mirrored those I had in Houston. There was an online discussion which Tseng Laoshi made us watch a recorded lesson on Learner.org where Fu Haiyan Laoshi taught a class of 3 different levels at the same time with the same theme, but different activities and assessments. Differentiated instruction requires careful planning; it's time-consuming but totally worth the effort.

#9

My first day was a near disaster. I thought the opening ceremony was underprepared, but the first day was just the opposite. Day 3 was a fun day !

Team one teachers created an exceptionally well-planned lesson which included a storyline of going to and winning the Chinese Bridge Chinese Singing Contest and a culturally enriched celebration with delicious Beijing specialties. The planning included learning a popular Chinese song with understandable lyrics and easy to follow beats. I went to the discussion board and posted YouTube links for students to learn before classes, but none had taken the opportunity. Thankfully, the song posed no challenge, with teaching video and simple practices everyone was a winner. I was surprised that the first session student who struggled through Day 1 was able to enjoy the singing and stayed ahead by sounding out new vocabulary words and explaining them to others. I later found out that Yuyang had given that student an afternoon tutorial the previous day. Extra help went a long way, without Yuyang sacrificing her precious afternoon, we probably wouldn't have completed the objectives, enjoyed the 5-minute fame, and sampled the local specialties.

Tseng Laoshi cleared the confusion between meaningful and communicative questions. Team one took it to a different level by creating a storyline which took students on a virtual journey where everyone was a glamorous superstar being interviewed by the press and celebrated by loved ones. Thanks to Team One!

#11

This was the first time I had to work alone from home. Without the support of Yujia and Yuyang, I was not sure how bad things would have gone. Yujia and Yuyang were the backbones of this program, I'd learned just about everything from them. Although they were the support team, they were actually my teachers in many aspects.

I noticed that I had a new internet provider, so I was very concerned, and the new headphone I'd purchased before leaving for Virginia quit working. Thankfully, technology was not an issue, thanks to Gao Laoshi's training, my PC functioned as planned. I was not as nervous as Friday, but I really wish my \$65.00 Skull Candy would have worked. A good headphone kept me from distractions and allowed me to focus on teaching online. Another good lesson learned.

We had been teaching two students in Virginia. In order for us to have a sense of reality, two classes were consolidated into one. Besides the two students we had, we each had an additional two students to teach. My team, team one, had everything planned out, down to the minute. We repeatedly practiced 'Breakout Rooms' together and individually, but most of us had to rush through the lesson plan because there was not enough time for a class of four students. My pace was not as fast as it should be, I was very uneasy when I realized time was running out, and my voice cracked when things didn't go as planned. The only thing I could think of for making improvement was to tough it out and kept trying.

#12

The closing was celebratory and memorable. We did it! I breathed a sigh of relief then felt a sense of vacancy. Coming home was comforting yet exhausting. When all was said and done, I began to miss my roommate, teammates, classmates, teachers, and UVa. To everyone who had an impact on my learning, let me express my sincere gratitude for all your help.

Despite the different circumstances, all students earned a perfect attendance. One student had to get ready for class before 5 in the morning while on vacation in Hawaii. The other one had a busy life, I came to know his family, pets, his workplace, and his clients. Then, there was this lovely young lady, who asked great questions, had to travel on the plane between families. This was a highly motivated class that every teacher dreamt of.

My last day of online teaching was intense but very relaxing. I was free to plan for, modify, practice, and deliver the final lesson. Best of all, I was in the comfort of my bedroom talking to students thousands of miles away. Without the hustle and bustle of getting up, getting ready, getting around the 4th largest city in the United States in the morning rush hours, I focused on the objectives and kept an eye on the clock. My class was diverse, each student was different. The modified lesson allowed students to work on tasks according to their proficiencies and paved their way to successfully mastered each activity; all students were able to produce paragraphs at the end. I was thrilled!

I applied for this 5-week training program because I wanted to help a small group of students to get back on track. Yet, the training had revolutionized my way of thinking. I learned a lot more than the knowledge and skills to teach online. Without noticing, I taught in 100% target language. Thanks to Tseng Laoshi and Startalk UVa, I am ready for the new school year!