

Selected Daily Reflections

June 29, 2010

We were in the classroom before 8:30 and I was ready to begin. Dr. Tseng gave us an overview of the course the requirements. I was a bit worried and not sure if I am able to complete the assignments, given such a short period of time. I was also worried about the practicum. I mean though I have been teaching for many years, I now have to apply what I learn directly into the lesson. Will I be able to do well?

Throughout the day, I learned many things from Dr. Tseng as well as the inputs from other teachers. I used to think that a Chinese teacher can teach whatever she thinks the students will need. But I now realized that there are standards and modes we can make use of. The 5 National Standards are new to me but I think it is hugely useful. I now know that when I plan the lesson or any activities, I need to focus on these elements and modes.

We also talked about Backward Design. Though I don't know the name officially, I have been using it to plan my lesson. My school is a 21st century PBL school. We teach by projects and that's why we always start off a unit with a teaching objective or a driving question. From then on, we utilized a top-down approach to decide what the students need to learn in order to answer that question, followed by activities, scaffolding activities, benchmarks to lead the students to achieve that objective. An example will be the unit on Ordering Food. The objective is for students to be able to order food in Chinese in a Chinese restaurant. Once I have this objective, I go backwards to decide on the vocabulary and activities. One of the activities is to bring them to a Chinese restaurant and communicate with the waiter. They have to order food and drinks in Chinese. In addition, they have to ask questions about the waiter. My students enjoy this particular project very much because I told them if they can't order it right, they may end up with no food or a plate with nothing but white rice!

I like the LinguaFolio too because it helps students to self-reflect on their learning. I do conduct self-assessments but they are not formalized and tend to be casual. I plan to use it when I return to school so I will have a better idea on their progress. The format of LinguaFolio is simple to use and best of all, it is free. Also, it matches the 3 communicative modes we talked about earlier.

I like the part when Dr. Tseng said that we are like a glass of water and that we now have to empty the glass to allow space for new water. I thought this is very appropriate and help to set the tone for the entire course.

One of the most valuable parts of today's learning is the exchange and interaction I have with other teachers. There are so many experienced teachers around me and I love the opportunity to learn from them. Shannon and PingPing gave me valuable

resources on books, websites. And Daphne assured me that the practicum will be fine. My roommate, Areana shared with me her knowledge on AP Chinese (it is not very common in New York). I am confident that by the end of this course, I will bring back so much to my school. My initial fear is almost gone, yes, almost and I look forward to another day. Not only that, I also look forward to the enhancement session which each teacher will share with the class. I know it will be great and whatever they teach me, I am sure they are google-proof.

June 30, 2010

It is another day of new knowledge, new ideas, enlightening concepts and principles. We have settled into our routine. The road from the hotel to the classroom seems shorter and easier to walk. Maybe it is because we are more comfortable with everything.

We started examining the theories and approaches in Second Language Teaching. It is interesting to know that the study of second language has such a long history, dated all the way back to 1970s. I enjoyed the discussion we have on Krashen's Monitor Model which talks about L1 and L2. I realized that in our family, we even have L3 and L4. The reason is that Singapore, where my home is, has many races. There are Singaporeans, Indians and as a result, my children, in addition to Mandarin and Cantonese, speaks Malay and Tamil (Indian Language). They are never confused because of Hypothesis 1 on natural acquisition.

Another interesting discussion is on Task-based Language Teaching. The school where I teach is a 21st century skill which focus on PBL (Project-based learning). To me, TBLT is very similar to PBL. The seven points under the definition of a "Task" is an eye-opener for me. I realized that there are many 'tasks' I do in class are actually exercises, which may not be as effective as they should be. We looked at many examples and tried to think of ways to convert an 'exercise' to a 'task'. I plan to work on this for the coming school year, converting drilling, routine exercise into meaningful tasks. I am excited and felt that my students will enjoy them.

There was also a debate on the importance of pronunciation vs using complex words. If a student uses complex words but inaccurate pronunciation and another student uses simple words but accurate pronunciation, which student should receive more marks? This generates much interest because it was always my philosophy to encourage students to open their mouths and talk, even though their pronunciation may not be 100% correct.

I agreed completely with the idea of Paradigm Shift. This is something that is emphasized continually in my school. Teachers, and not just language teachers, should shift from teacher-centered to student-centered.

I spoke with a few more teachers and was fortunate to share their resources and their knowledge. Leonard shared with me the QQ software which is far more superior than IME, an built-in language input which I am currently using. He also

shared with us his knowledge of some really good software like teaching stroke order etc. Shannon shared with me on some useful teachers' materials that I can purchase online for my students.

I am excited about returning to school and applying what I learn today.

All in all, I want to say is - 学无止境！

July 1, 2010

我的杯子已经再装不下水了。我要换一个大的杯子，因为有很多宝贵的水，我要把它全带会去。

Today is a "Brain Day" for me. We had Dr. Ferree who is also called the "BrainLady" spoke to us about Brains and SLA. It is definitely one of the most interesting and inspiring speech I heard. I realized that there are so many things I don't know about my own brain. Brain is probably one of the most intricate organ within our body. I understand neurons better and how they fire each other. Grace talked about how one of her friends had a brain tumor and as a result, he needs an operation and he was warned that he will change into a different person once the operation is over because whatever they do on his brain will alter his personality. I guess I need to take care of my brain from now on.

Dr. Ferre opened her discussion with an interesting experiment. It is about how our focus can affect our memory. She also said something that is really interesting - Students remember more when they have emotions connected to it. In other words, if I just come up with a list of words and have them memorized, they are not going to remember that much because there are no emotion. I need to return to school and apply this thinking.

We have many interesting discussions on brain today and the best part is about the relation between brain and SLA. Dr. Ferre said something that all of us loved to hear and that is Chinese speakers have increased activation in right hemisphere. Also, knowing how to read one language will help one to read in another language better. Isn't that something?

In the afternoon, Dr. Tseng talked about Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary in Communicative and Authentic Contexts. She also did a few demos. They are very interesting and put us to see things from a student's perspective.

I just finished today's assignment and watched two videos. They are excellent demonstration on using Total Chinese Immersion. I want to be like them when I finish the course - energetic, resourceful, creative and most importantly, they are able to accomplish the instructional objectives and yet inject so much fun in the class.

I talked with more teachers today and learn more of their expertise. It is my goal to sit with a different teacher each day so I can get to know them. At the end of the course, I hope I am able to get to know all of them and to share their skills and talents.

We received our assignment for Saturday microteaching. My teammates and I are going to work hard to do well.

July 2, 2010

Today is my 26th Wedding Anniversary and is also the first time I did not celebrate with my husband. I felt bad and I just explained to my husband this morning. I assure him I will compensate and celebrate with him when I get home. I hope he understand.

Today is another day packed with ideas and suggestions. 谭老师 is a great speaker. She is full of energy and is very generous to share with us her materials and supplies. Her topic today is using culture to teach language. She gave us many examples of activities, tasks, assessments etc. we can use in our classroom. I enjoyed the activity we have on using phrases to explain culture. For example, 陈老师 commented that Chinese likes to ask others, "Have you eaten?" as a way of greeting. The cultural factor behind this is that Chinese are very reserved and would never say "I love you". But asking others if they have eaten shows they care for them. So "吃" and "爱" really means the same thing. I never thought of explaining this to the students this way. I absorbed many great ideas and is ready to return to 'revolutionarize' my classroom.

I had a discussion with 老师和 侯老师 last night on our assigned topic for microteaching tomorrow. We were in room and I was so touched when she kept some dinner for me (Yes, I did not have dinner because there is no time to go out and eat). Being way from home, it's nice to feel care and concern from other teachers. I think every teacher in this group are very nice and are very willing to help. We have a great discussion on how we can apply what we have learned to our mini-lesson on Saturday. I am excited and look forward to it.

We did several activities on authentic materials. It reminded me that I can collect a lot of these materials from my upcoming trip to Beijing. Like what the teachers say, students will like anything that are brought back from the target country even though it may just be a ticket stub, a menu or a bus schedule.

谭老师 also talked about differentiated teaching. This is my topic of interest since I have students of various abilities and I always found it hard to manage it effectively. She suggested many tasks and activities we can use. I definitely want to do that but just not sure if I have the time to prepare them.

In the afternoon, a representative from the University of Virginia newsletter visited us. I was one of the teachers being interviewed. And of course, I used the analogy on the empty glass of water. She loves it and probably thinks that all Chinese are philosophical.

OK – Back to work. Our microteaching is exactly 15 ½ hours away!

July 3, 2010

I have a really practical day today because all groups presented their microteaching lesson. The night before, I was really nervous. I sat with my teammates – 侯老师和张老师, and discussed how we should teach this, applying the concepts and principles we learned. We all wonder why we are nervous since all of us are experienced teachers. After all, it is only a 6-minute lesson. I guess we are nervous because we know other teachers who are just as experienced are watching us. This seems to make us feel a bit uncomfortable.

We are definitely frustrated by the fact that we don't have internet connection in our room. And every time, we need resources from the web, we have to go downstairs. We had fun discussing on our topic. I think the three of us make a great team because our personality and teaching styles complement each other.

We were still adding things in right at the very minute before our turn. When it was finally over, I could not help but let out a big sigh – it's over! The class gave us very valuable feedback which I will use them and be better. The teachers were all very good. They were creative and resourceful. There are so much to learn from them.

The highlight of today's lesson is really on 李老师的 teaching demonstration. She used a lot of authentic materials, visual aids and many other unimaginable resources. Her topic was "Going to a Chinese restaurant". I liked the two songs she taught us – a song about "Fruits" and a song about "Ordering Food". I used to think that high school students would think singing song is childish. I never tried to teach them. I think I am wrong. I also liked the part where she gave us each a packet of salt, sugar and pepper so we can try and learn the vocabulary words accordingly. We did various student-centered activities. All these inspire me for my future lessons. We were told that 李老师 did not sleep until 4am in the morning.

Wow! 辛苦了, 李老师!

曾老师 conducted a mini-lesson on using palm technology in classroom. I thought it was really interesting. Though I may not use it (each student in my school has his own laptop), I have certainly learned something.

Our lesson has ended. What is ahead of us is using all the concepts, principles,

methods we learned and apply them in our practicum next week.

Time remaining to practicum is 3 ½ days for my first lesson!

July 7, 2010

It is over! Well, at least 1/3 of it. We did our first practicum today. I am so glad that it is over. All three of us are really experienced teachers but we just could not understand why we are so nervous. It is especially so for our rehearsal. We watched one of the group's rehearsal before us and felt that we are so under-prepared. Our instruction flow was not clear and we received a lot of constructive criticism. We were very worried and not sure if we can make it.

We slept very little for the past two days. There are times when I felt discouraged. I missed home and family and wonder if I can still go on. We spent a lot of time, thinking and thinking how we can make it better, applying all the principles and concepts we learn so far. Maybe this is the reason why we are nervous because we want to do our best.

Surprisingly, we did good – at least that's what we heard from other teachers. We were so relieved when it is over and were also very glad to see that the students enjoyed the lesson. Our activities are pretty engaging and I must say that the students are very smart. They picked up the new words almost right away.

I am beginning to see why 100% immersion is such an effective teaching method. I used to think that it is not possible to speak just Chinese. But after just 2 lessons, many students are able to pick up the language and speak accordingly. The whole concept behind this is to 'immerse' them in the culture and the language. I can't wait to return to school and use this method.

No rest today. We need to start preparing for our next topic.

July 9, 2010

We are done today which means there is only one more lesson to go. I am glad and felt that the tasks seem smaller now. As I reflect on my experience so far, I can't help but realize that I did get better in my teaching methods, delivery and application of what we have learned. I must admit that the preparation of our second lesson seem more meaningful now.

When we first started preparing our first lesson, we had too many ideas. We could not decide what we should do. As a result, we wasted a lot of time trying to consolidate our thoughts. We put together our powerpoint slides with activities and demonstration. We really thought we were good. We received a lot of feedback,

commenting on our instructional flow. The feedback were good and constructive. They have pointed out things to us that we could not see before. I guess we were too involved in designing the lesson from the teacher's perspectives and had failed to see the other side. I am glad that we have the rehearsal before the actual delivery because the feedback we have was very valuable.

We took in the suggestions and went back and improve on our slides, our activities and our delivery. The result was a very rewarding Chinese class. We taught the younger students and they are very smart. They were able to understand what we are trying to teach. Of course, some of them were faster than the rest. But overall, it is a great class. When the lesson ended, it was like a big load off our shoulder.

The preparation for the 2nd lesson seems a bit easier. Maybe because we are more familiar with the flow and the requirements. The rehearsal yesterday went smoothly and again, we received a lot of valuable feedback. We felt we are better prepared.

I love today's class! The atmosphere was good and the students (from the bigger class) were very responsive. We had fun playing jianzi, ping-pong. We even do gongfu and taiji. I felt very comfortable doing this because I had done this many times with my students. Interacting with students and maintaining an exciting yet learning classroom are probably some of my strengths. Our team members complement each other very well since each of us has our own strengths. Even though the lesson may not be perfect, we felt we had done our best.

We learned new things today from other fellow teachers. I had always looked forward to enhancement sessions because I know I will benefit from other teachers' expertise.

So, one more lesson to go. Time passes quickly. I can't believe that we have been here in Charlottesville for almost 2 weeks. I get to know other teachers better and realized that all of us are very diligent and hardworking. There are so much I can learn from them.