

Selected Daily Reflections

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06/29

I honestly don't know how Tseng laoshi powered through all these big topics from national standards to OPI and Linguafolio in one day! We even spent time talking about backward design and studying a few sample lesson plans this afternoon. It was an intense day full of "big words" but a useful one that provides the framework and structure for our future work. Suddenly, all these terms with which I am vaguely familiar all makes sense now.

It was also a lot of fun to learn about all these different Chinese programs in the language lab this afternoon. I taught ActiveChinese, also a multi-media online program very similar to Contemporary Chinese, this past year. So it was nice to get to see other programs out there. I'm hoping to spend some time playing around with the programs introduced in today's session in the next three weeks.

06/30

For the longest time, I thought teacher-fronted teaching style (mode) is evil, and student-centered teaching is the fancy word to use, especially at job interviews. I am so glad that we took the time to compare these two modes of teaching with the combination of either structured-based or communicative teaching methods. I've come to realize that effective language acquisition has to be carefully monitored, whether in a structured-based setting or using communicative approach. The key is to make sure every step of the way from activity to drill is meaning-based. Zhao laoshi's message that "meaning is the first thing that human brain processes" is now my motto for teaching and lesson planning. It has to have meaning in order for students to process and retain the information for the long term.

07/02

The highlights of my day today are Tseng laoshi and Zhao laoshi's demonstrations. Tseng laoshi showed us how to teach simple 把字句 by combing objects and direction words. I've never thought of teaching them together. It was creative and extremely easy to follow and comprehend for students. We started with learning how to say a few items such as key, pen, paper, and money. And then we studied direction words including right, left, behind, in front of, and in the center. Tseng laoshi simply used a few hand gestures to turn the information presented just now into a complete sentence "Key is on the right" (There is a key on the right). The magic moment happened right here when she introduced 把 by adding the structure 把钥匙放在右边. Everything was brought together! I wish I had such 功力。

I took one full page of note on Zhao laoshi's demo teaching on day 1 "Greeting" lesson. Day 1 in Chinese I has always been my favorite "day" in teaching. Nothing is more satisfying than watching the "Wow! This is how it works!" expressions of the students. I am also doing something very similar to Zhao laoshi's demo in my day 1 class, and from today's session, I took away a lot of tips on how to improve my PPT slides. I've learned to use students' audio memory of the sounds from the exercises to create the false belief that they are able to read characters (but actually not). Ha! This is just way cool to miss. "Set up for success" is another of my new mottos for teaching – along with "Practice makes permanent". Zhao laoshi has lots of cool ideas, just like her collection of dresses ☺

07/03

Studying theories of second language acquisition helps me understand how brain works and process the information. But one of the most powerful types of learning comes from actually doing it. After four days of intensive cramming of big words, we've finally had the opportunity of being in action. We were divided into five groups of three, and our assignment was to come up with a short teaching demo (5~10 minutes) on one grammatical pattern (assigned by Tseng laoshi) with both teacher-fronted and student-centered activities. My group was assigned 比字句. I personally think using images is the most effective way to teach 比字句 because it is such a visual concept. Therefore, we spent quite a lot of time looking for appropriate images online to make PPT slides. The more exaggerated the images, the better. It creates comic effect, and kids love having fun. Usually after the teacher-front activity (teaching and the drill), I would have my students do some kinds of activities to practice the new pattern. With 比字句, the activity that I do all the time is image jigsaw. Students are given a stack of image cards, and they are free to make any sentences using 比字句 with these images. I love it when my students are having a good time even though their sentences could be really silly or even crazy. As long as their sentences are grammatically correct, I give my students a lot of freedom.

We were given a lot of very constructive feedback and advice on our teaching demo. Likewise, I also learned a lot from other groups' demo teaching and class discussion. "An apple was eaten." and "What's in my bag?" are my favorite two activities today.

07/04

We celebrated Fourth of July by observing our first STARTALK class and participating in a discussion about our observation afterwards.

I've observed many classes taught at Middlebury in the past two summers, but this was the first time I had the 5C standards and 3 communication modes in mind when I observed a class. It's quite exciting being able to identify these standards in a real class, and more and more so, I am seeing the importance of these standards in lesson planning and running an effective foreign language classroom.

Moreover, in the past, I focused on mostly techniques used by the instructor when

observing a class, but this time my goal was to see how the instructor used both teacher-fronted and student-centered activities. We talked about how to improve each type of activities and what might work better for what kind of exercises in class discussion later on.

“How to maximize quality student talk time?” – is another new goal for my future teaching.

07/15

Last week was intense. I have never worked this hard to prepare for a class, but I am glad that Zhao laoshi and Tseng laoshi “forced” us to do something all of us probably would not have done or wanted to do — to teach without a textbook! What?!

I was asked to step outside my comfort zone to teach with anything that I could get my hands on. We had to use authentic materials and speak no English or use minimal English if absolutely needed. I have to confess that I speak a whole lot of English in class because I love cracking jokes here and there (because I am funnier in English but not so much in Chinese). Not being able to use any English proves more challenging than not using textbook to teach. I worked hard to get my message across and make sure students understand my instruction for doing an activity or playing a game. What I learned the most from this past week’s teaching practicum is the importance of teacher modeling. It actually worked! Students were able to comprehend most of the instruction with effective teacher modeling. And it seems to me that they were having a good time even though things were a little chaotic at times as they tried to figure out the rules in Chinese. But isn’t this part of learning a new language? I need to let go the hands of my students so they could learn to stand on their own feet.

I also worked on strategies for managing student pair work as I planned for activities each day. I got better and better with time management and was able to do all the activities in my lesson plan and met the instructional objectives by the end of week.

In addition, observing other people’s classes was incredibly inspiring. It was very exciting to see all these talented teachers showcase their tricks and superb Power Point/animation skills (no kidding, some of them should be working for Pixar!). It’s never too late to learn. With the birth of my first homemade movie (special thanks to Zhao laoshi, Andrew, and VCU’s time-restricted language lab), I might be making movies soon. Nothing is more fun than the joy of learning (it’s the nerd in me speaking), and being in the role of student makes me appreciate the work of my teachers. For this very reason, I think this is why all of us chose the career of teaching.