

Selected Daily Reflections

06/21/2011--- Epilogue: implications for Teaching & Reflection

Making theory connect with teaching experience/ practice was highly emphasized in today's lesson. Most of us have years of teaching experience; however, applying the research support practices to our teaching and using them as guidelines to examine the designed tasks are ignored sometimes because of various reasons. Professor Tseng's emphasis on the research support practice has made me conscience to how I teach Chinese. In addition, the academics reading of Epilogue: Implications for Teaching provides me with clear understanding regarding the importance of meaningful input in our class. Connecting theories with experiences is one of my new goals and I will bring this with me as I return to the classroom in September. Linguafolio assessment and the concept of meaningful input, which are the 5 implications, are what I would like to work on and further explore.

The article talks about 5 implications which are:

- 1)the more input, the better (the more meaning-based the class, the better)
- 2) the more interaction, the better,
- 3) all-learner production should be meaning-based or communicative,
- 4)focus on form should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication
- 5)we should watch out for what we expect of learners.

By applying these five implications to self-examining/ accessing my own teaching, I noticed that some of my activities slipped into more language practice. Because students at my school are young, teachers often need to help them to review words or sentence patterns in class. I definitely need to design more effective and meaningful ways to help my students become familiar with new words in reading and speaking. In order to help us understand about the five implications, Professor Tseng demonstrated a lesson she wrote and actually used on her students. She proves to us that theory can be turned into a real practice.

The three types of drills Professor Tseng mentioned today is new information to me. I only heard about mechanical drilling and knew it was

necessary, especially for beginners. However, with the emphasis on the concept of meaningful input, communicative drilling and meaningful drilling should be used frequently during teaching. Professor Tseng further explained that when the information is predictable, it is called meaningful drilling, on the other hand, when the information is not predictable, it is called communicative drilling. With these two easy and clear definitions, I will be able to apply the two types of drilling into my own teaching and increase comprehension input with meaningful ways of language practice.

It is a busy, yet enjoyable first day of the training.

06/22/2011

<How to Learn Teaching Techniques from Classroom Observation>

The article of <How to Learn Teaching Techniques from Classroom Observation > has brought out some attention to the details that are often ignored when new teachers are observing classes. I actually enjoyed reading this article because Professor Liang has clearly stated what observers have to prepare before observation, during observation and after observation. The stage of before observation is sometimes ignored. Professor Liang emphasized that if we want to understand and learn how teachers apply techniques into their teaching from classroom observations, we must have some basic understanding about the background of the learners, the teacher and the lessons before we observe a particular class.

In addition, I believe investigating the above mentioned ideas are also a respectful gesture/ courtesy to the teachers we plan to observe and avoid misunderstandings while we are observing class. Through reading the questions that she listed under each category brought me to interact with and reflect upon my own teaching styles and reading texts. Next time I will know how to prepare myself before I observe classes and be a better observer.

Professor Liang also mentioned that “听课听得多与达到提高教学质量并不一定成显著正比”。I totally agree with this statement. This is because we sometimes don't quite understand what we want to learn through our classroom observations. Therefore, setting an objective “有针对性的观摩课堂教学其效果会更好” before starting classroom observation is a great start. Professor Liang suggested that observers can just choose one or two items that want to learn/observe from classroom observation. This point is actually very important to observers so we will not be overwhelmed or distracted from what we really want to learn from observations.

This article has given me deeper and creative thoughts on classroom observations; I wish there was a sample observation form from Professor Liang.

06/23/2011

Task-based language teaching (TBLT)

What a great experience to relearn/review theories and approaches in second language teaching today!

Professor Tseng guided us step by step to connect theories with tasks/practice. Each task is embedded with a certain theory. Through numerous tasks Professor Tseng assigned to each group, we learned to practice the theories and I finally felt that theories do not just exist on paper or in the mind. The practices we had today provided me some strategies to design tasks, while new ideas continued to bloom during the group discussion: I have learned to apply theory into the tasks. It is truly learning by doing!

Each day of learning is so valuable, so I am setting another personal goal to remind myself what I want to do after this training.

My second goal: Task-based language teaching using integrated performance assessment (tasks) for the next school year Chinese language arts curriculum.

I had heard about task-based learning and teaching, but did not really understand what it was and how to use it effectively in class before today. Fortunately, I got the opportunity to explore and learn how to define a task, thanks to Professor Tseng!

The features of a task are quite useful when it comes to examining the tasks we design. They are 1) focus on meaning, 2) self-determined language resources, 3) real-life experiences/situations, 4) clearly defined communicative outcomes. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. For example, calling a doctor.

The steps of TBLT are

1)pre-task: introduction topic

2)task cycle: task, planning, report

3)language focus: analysis and practice; review and repeat task

I like the idea of using authentic language on asking students to do

meaningful tasks. Task-based learning is advantageous to students because it is more student-centered. Students are allowed to use all the language they know and are learning, rather than just using target language of a lesson. Since task-based learning is student-centered, students are more likely to be engaged and produce more meaningful communication through the process of tasks. However, I am not planning to implant the original task-based principles. Instead, I will use task-based for language practice and assessments. Students will be given a scenario related to their life experiences or problem-solving as a task at the end of a lesson or unit. This will be more practical for my teaching environment.

06/23

Authentic material

I had so much fun working with my partners all day! Authentic material is highly emphasized and it is great to have the lesson today. Ms. Pierce is such a talented teacher! I love her ideas and ways of incorporating the authentic material into her lessons.

She showed us the song called “游女吟.” This idea reminds me of the experience I had when I was studying in Utah five years ago. My teacher asked us to listen to a song and fill in the blanks. I was very frustrated with this activity. Actually, I hated this activity. I couldn't understand a word from the music and not to mention reading the lyrics and then filling in the correct word I heard. I was not sure what the purpose of this activity was at the time. Through Ms. Pierce's sample, I knew there is another way to teach songs and make it meaningful and fun. I like the idea of listing the words to assist students. We want our students to be successful and learning from the process of practice in each task we give them. Ms. Pierce asked us to read the sentences and use/guess the words she listed to complete sentences, before we listened to the song <游女吟>. I can't wait to try this experiment in September.

This afternoon, we continued our Task-Based Language Teaching approach. Each day I am learning valuable knowledge that will improve my teaching skills.

Today, I finally have gained a better understanding of some terminologies. Professor Tseng mentioned that *exercises* and *tasks* are different. Exercises are intentional, language “learners” and form-focused. On the other hand, tasks are incidental, language “users” and meaning-focused. Turning exercises to tasks is an idea and it is do-able. She further explored with us the definition of Task-supported vs. Task-based instruction. I am very excited to learn new knowledge each day.

One of the key points professor Tseng mentioned is layers (层次性). I interpreted that layers are like “chains”. Each link is connected to another one. Through applying the teaching technique of layers (层次性) step by step, teachers are actually giving comprehensible input (i+1). This helps students to succeed and meet objectives of each lesson more easily. Here is the example Professor Tseng demonstrated.

T: 这是什么?

S: 这是水。

T: 一瓶水。这是一瓶水。
这瓶水是谁的?

S:.....

What a great reminder! Working in an immersion program makes it very easy to forget this important technique because students have really great oral proficiency. Therefore, I tend to skip a couple of steps when I teach. However, I will definitely keep this in mind.

6-24-2011

TPR&TPRS

TPR and TPRS are two very common teaching techniques we use in our immersion language learning environment as well as other programs. As Ms. Small mentioned, the traditional TPR doesn't force learners to repeat after teachers. The philosophy of TPR is to create a "stress-free environment", students "have right to be silent" and students are provided with "lots of comprehensible language during the process." Based on today's experiment, it was fun in the beginning, until I was lost and had a hard time to retain/distinguish sounds I heard. During the whole practice, I had to use my "ears" to listen, not eyes. It forced me to really pay attention to hear the sounds and tried to do the correct body movement. I also apply TPR in my teaching, but students are encouraged to listen to the sounds, do the actions and then "practice saying words. " I believe it's important to encourage students to practice using the target language in the beginning. Being able to speak some Chinese in the beginning level actually motivates them to learning. Outputting is a way of building their confidence because students start to feel that they can speak the target language now. Each student is applying a very unique learning style so I have to change the techniques in order to fit into my students' learning styles.

I am very interested in TPRS and finally know how this technique is used today. Ms. Pierce introduced that the first step of TPRS is to start with PQA (personal question and answer). This information is quite important for me to know. Usually, my students listen to a story through my movement. I think providing students with completed context is important because it helps them to activate their scheme. Second, I invite them to do the same body movement with me and then they have to repeat the story line with me each time. The last step is working on new words and asking questions related to the story. So far it is working fine with my students. However, I would love to try out the traditional TRPS next time.

7-1-2011

Theme: Meeting Chinese family

Objective of the lesson: act in a culturally appropriate way visiting a Chinese home (accepting foods and beverage and courtesy)

I am very happy that I reached the objective of the lesson as well as my personal expectations towards my learning from the Startalk program.

I expected myself to improve in the three areas that Ming Laoshi told me after my first teaching on Wednesday. My reflection focuses on these three areas from the first teaching.

1. Too much teacher-lead practice
2. Comprehension checks need to be clear
3. Presentation

Because the lesson I taught was about teaching students how to act in a culturally appropriate way when visiting a Chinese family, it was quite challenging planning this lesson. However, it actually helps me to think outside the box and try to find more logical and meaningful ways to teach students and to apply the best practice techniques into my teaching because I have not taught this topic before. While teaching, I followed the steps that Tseng Laoshi has emphasized since day one. She taught us that teachers should give clear modeling first. Because students' attention spans are short, our pace should be fast, yet still comprehensible to students and able to keep them interested in the lesson. The second step follows with teacher-student(s) practice within 3 minutes. During the second step, we have to remember to make comprehension checks too. Last, we should allow students to learn the new language through using communicative drills as well as giving them tasks. I am very proud of myself for applying these important steps into my teaching and I really saw students retain what we learned and used them naturally when they presented their own dialogues related to visiting people.

Compared to my first teaching, the teacher-lead has decreased very much. Students had lots of time to work in pairs and to practice speaking Chinese to each other. I also felt that I checked with students more and made sure they fully understood what I asked them to perform. This time I was patient to model the dialogues a couple of more times and to observe students facial expressions in order to give more assistance. This is really important because I sometimes forget to do that if I am excited or rushed to make sure I cover everything I planned for a lesson.

I really want students to be successful and decrease their affective filter because learning a new language should be fun and meaningful for learners, especially in an immersion learning setting. There is a Chinese expression

called 庖丁解牛. I expect myself to anticipate each detail that might confuse students while learning a new concept. Preparing them to be successful and enjoying learning is important to students. This teaching philosophy has made highly influential on my teaching. Therefore, I felt that I was prepared and able to handle possible situations that might occur yesterday.

Summing up, the second teaching experience helped me polish my teaching techniques and increase my confidence. This valuable teaching experience also helped me to discover my potentials as an educator. Now I feel that it is not scary to teach high school students at all. I am ready to accept any challenges. I am exceptionally grateful to have this opportunity to be here and learn from Tseng and other teachers.