

## Selected Daily Reflections

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### **Day 1, June 29**

“How to teach Chinese in Chinese from day one” has been a heated topic in discussion in Chinese teaching field. This is one of my teaching goals but I have to admit that I still use quite a few English in activity instruction, answering questions and in teaching grammar and culture. At my school, all foreign language teachers—Spanish and French teachers—are teaching their target languages in the target languages. It has been my “excuse” that Chinese is way harder than these languages for English speakers and in order to reduce the confusion and student anxiety, I “have to” use some English in my Chinese class. Most of the administrators, colleagues and parents seem to agree with me and have whole trust in me, but somehow I believe there is a way to do better. I am glad to hear today that “we can” teach Chinese in Chinese and that it’s “doable.” I am very excited and curious to see how we can do that. I believe if we “think hard”—as in teacher Daphne Lee’s word—we can make it, but it really takes a lot of efforts and experiences to make it work. I have set my one of my goals next year I will teach Chinese in Chinese from day one. Although I still don’t have much clue how to do it, hopefully by the end of three-week training, I will have the confidence and skills to do so.

### **Day 2, June 30**

I like the activity today when we evaluated various exercises and tasks in different textbooks and to explore how we can change or expand these practices into communicative and interactive tasks. It is especially interesting and inspiring to find out that we are able to change a very traditional fill-in-blank and sentence re-formation exercises into a communicative and performance-based task. I think we don’t have to entirely discard the fill-in-blank and sentence re-formation practices; we can assign them as homework the night before for students to preview and prepare for the integrated and more complicated task today.

Since the shock “teaching Chinese in Chinese from day one” yesterday, I was in shock again when Dr. Tseng insisted today that no translation and no dialogue memorization in her Chinese classes. I believe many teachers use translation and memorization of dialogues still, including me. I found that students find translation hard and that the appearance of the English sentences very often ruins the immersion environment where students and I try hard to do everything in Chinese. Some of my students, however, value the translation practice and see it as a way to expand their sentence complexity and variety. Many of my elementary level students also find memorization of short dialogues interesting and helpful in

enhancing their speaking ability, especially pronunciation. Of course, I only ask students to memorize the first few lessons which are short, useful, and pretty easy to remember, and will move on to more meaningful and communicative activities when the level goes up.

### **Day 3, July 1**

Another inspiring day full of fresh reminders in various teaching concepts! I've heard all of them but haven't been able to insist and put everything into practice. I think that's the reason why we as teachers come to conferences and teaching workshops: to be reminded and educated that these things *can* happen in our classes, *if we insist*.

#### **No Need for Grammar Analysis**

Dr. Tseng reminded us that our students don't need to be experts in Chinese grammar, not in phonology, semantics, or syntax, etc. Although that's the way most of us were taught, and that's how most of us feel secure and comfortable with, we need to be consciously reflect the way we teach and to make efforts to change and improve our teaching philosophy and ideas. Grammar analysis can be one of the most convenient ways to teach and we need to constantly remind ourselves not to be lured and stuck in the "comfort zone."

#### **Keep Students Busy!!**

I did most of my activities in about 15 minutes and it's interesting to hear today that some teachers design their lessons with more shorter activities and in faster pace. It's true that faster tempo can better maintain students' attention and that students get more opportunities in learning and practicing. And that's where high quality of the teacher-fronted scaffolding comes necessary, as the clear instruction and modeling are the key for successful student-centered activities, especially when there is few time allowed for confusion in a tightly-knitted class schedule.

#### **Use Textbook as a Script**

Again, speaking of the "comfort zone" of the students and teachers, textbook is another area that we need to avoid, at least not to rely too much, in class. It's inspiring to hear that we should assign textbook for preview and review activities, and for individual study use, not for class. Textbook should be used as script, teacher (the actor/actress and director of the play) and students (the actors/actresses) should study the textbook at home and then in class it should be for rehearsal and performance without script.

#### **The Gap Between Language Levels**

It's interesting to know that there is a general gap among Chinese language learners in the US education system between intermediate high and advanced level. I understand it generally takes the longest time and most efforts for a learner in intermediate level to reach advanced one as the learner has reached the learning plateau, but it seems especially true in Chinese. However, I'm optimistic about this as there are more and more younger students learning Chinese now that maybe eventually most of the Chinese classes in university level will be in intermediate and advanced level. There will be classes more diverse and extensive in these levels available, thus the gap can be narrowed. This was already the case in the summer intensive Chinese classes in Middlebury College as they had the most students enrolled in level 3 classes in 2008.

### **Be the Best of Yourself!!**

It's again inspiring (I know I've used the word "inspiring" a million times!! but that's really what I feel most of the time) to hear Hou laoshi saying "we should be ourselves." We can learn as many techniques as possible but we can never become another teacher no matter how hard we try to imitate their teaching styles. "And we should be the *best* of ourselves," is a 當頭棒喝 (I don't think there is an equivalent expression in English as vivid as this one in Chinese) to me. I asked myself if I have been the best I can be, or at least have tried to be the best I can be, and I know I still have a long way to go.

### **Day 4, July 2**

#### **Analyze the Cultural Implication in the Languages**

“你吃了吗？” “慢走啊！” “书香门第” ...there is so much cultural implication in daily languages! It was wonderful to revisit many phrases and sentences in daily conversations, to explore the rich culture behind them, and further discuss how we can incorporate the thoughts and ideas into our language teaching. Sometimes we just focus on the language, and forget about (or don't have time to think about) the culture embedded in the language. We should form the habit to examine the language we are teaching. The more often we do so, the more sensitive and skilled we will become in teaching the culture along with the language. We should also train our students to be sensitive and skilled observers of the target culture as well. I agree with Tan laoshi, that culture should be the central theme of our language teaching. I also like the idea of “**Edit your task, not your text.**” This not only relieves the tremendous burden of teachers from collecting different materials for different levels, but also enriches the beginning level classes where the majority of teachers thought the complex authentic materials can't exist.

#### **Be Our Own Advocate**

Tan laoshi also reminded us several times that we should learn to advocate for

ourselves and our programs. Job security might be one issue, but I agree that we should learn to voice our opinions, needs, ideas, even disappointment or anger, more often. “Just say something!” I would tell myself that every time in the department or whole school meeting, I should try to say something. Most of us are in “one-man program;” we teach and promote our programs at the same time, and we are the only advocate for ourselves. Therefore we need to learn to be “team players,” in Tan laoshi’s word, in order to increase our program exposure and to learn from other language teachers who have longer experience teaching the students in our respective schools. I do sense some other language teachers’ pressure (not direct hostility to me yet though) of losing their student enrollment and eventually jobs due to the “sudden” appear of Chinese language need and market on the horizon. I love all languages and hate to see any language program or teacher go away because of me or my program. Every language has its own significance, and opens different doors for different students. I’m so moved by the student of Hou laoshi saying “学中文让我找到了自己的天空。” I’m glad the appearance of Chinese program opens the doors for some students, but will be sad to see the disappearance of some other language programs shut doors for others.

### **Day 8, July 6**

Today is the first day of practicum. Every one of us has been looking forward to this day for a long time and is eager to apply what we have learned at the program into a real classroom. Being as one of the first teachers on the first day to go on stage, besides the excitement and nervousness as in a regular first day of school, I also felt like carrying a huge stone on my back: the responsibility—the responsibility to prove, to prove to the students, to my fellow participants, to the world, and to myself, that I can do it, that “we” can do it. I was anxious, maybe not shown on face, and worried what if the students can’t understand me? What if Dr. Tseng and the rest of the participants are disappointed? What if I fail?

Before I realized it, the first lesson was finished. I wasn’t happy at my teaching at all. Students seemed to understand what I was trying to teach, but their outputs still have a long way to go. I have known grammar teaching is challenging to me, and after the first lesson, I know I have to keep trying.

The second lesson, my partner Zoe went on to the stage. I was soon amazed by her calmness and elegance in delivering the lesson. Her logic was very clear, shown step by step on her flashing PowerPoint slides. This is one of the places I need to work on.

The third lesson, it was my turn again. I was a lot calmer and more relaxed. Students learned number 1 to 10 pretty quickly and seemed to participate more actively and enjoyed the game and activity I planned. It was a more fun and more productive lesson compared to the first one.

Thought I know I still have *a lot of* room for improvement in my teaching, such as speaking a bit slower, clearer, and my grammar instruction needs to be more logic, with more practice time for students, etc., I was happy to realize that I was able to finish all lessons, good or bad, in entirely Chinese. This is one of the goals I wanted to achieve when I came to the program and I was very proud of myself that I made it!

**Day 14, July 12**

Today is the third (and last) time I teach. Although I was as nervous as the first day, the moment I stepped on the stage I was relaxed and able to focus and enjoy the interaction with students. My topic today was clothes, and this is fun because I was able to use the teacher-student interaction a lot in my lesson by having students talk about the clothes they were wearing today. By the time students acquire all necessary vocabulary on clothes, we had a fashion show and a shopping activity! It was two fun parties and students get to use the language they have learned to talk about various different color and clothing styles, and to bargain for a good deal in buying clothes and fruits (the previous topic.) The students would need more practice time in order to produce better output, but I was glad all of them had high motivation to apply what they have learned and to speak in front of the class.

Again, I know myself still has a long way to go. However, I think I have gained and achieved the reason why I came to the program—to learn to use Chinese the entire class time, and to plan my lessons to be as communicative and interactive as possible. I was amazed to see the improvement in myself and other teacher participants over the weeks. I know I am on the right track and have the confidence that I will continue to move forward in that direction after I return to my home school.