

## **Self Reflections**

**2010 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy**  
**Shofei Chiu**

### **Day1 Reflection, June 29**

It's a day of mixed feelings – excitement, curiosity, and anxiety. Yes, being a learner in a new class, I am just as fresh as my 1<sup>st</sup> year students. It's good to have this kind of experience once in a while, so I can remind myself how my students may feel and have some mercy on them.

The 5 C's, hmm, an old topic that I thought I had been quite familiar with, were re-recognized today. They are something I embed in our teaching, but hardly put any effort analyzing them.

As for the LinguaFolio, I think I can adapt it and design something similar for my students in the beginning and the end of a school year.

The goal Prof. Tseng gave us is like to dream the impossible dream. However, before I came, I had decided to put myself down and trust her guidance. Today, during the discussion, I was surprised and impressed at other teachers inputs. I am now kind of convinced that maybe it is possible.

### **Day2 Reflection, June 30**

Day 2! Should I use 才 or 就? When I think of my dear family, it seems that I still have a long way to go. However, the excitement of learning new stuff and expecting to apply them in my teaching has somehow triggered my avarice. Like a greedy child, I have started to worry if I will be able to dig out all the beautiful shells and carry them home before the sunset.

D

We learned about theories and approaches today. I have never realized these stuff and the old professors can be so amusing! Who could imagine we laughed so much and even fought for speaking in a class of theories?

Besides laughter, I secretly felt guilty a couple of times when I examined my own teaching while Prof. Tseng mentioned about some strategies/approaches.

Regarding the early approaches- GTM and ALM, I thought I had quite got rid of them, but maybe I have not quite put away my security blanket yet. I was born in the 60's in Taiwan and never left there until 1989. The

traditional approaches I used to hate had been more or less influenced me on my teaching, especially when I run out of ideas and had no energy or time to create something exciting.

The terms of the approaches to me, though most are not new, were like a bag of tangled yarn sitting at the corner for years, messy and being ignored. In fact, I never had the desire to clear the confusion. But what Prof. Tseng said is right - to be the expert, I have no excuse not to reorganize them.

The other day, I commented that Prof. Tseng is more artistic than scientific when giving directions. After these two days, it looks like I have to take my words back. In fact, now I wonder how she can smoothly mingle the opposite characteristics together without confliction – imaginative but scientific; with academic rigor but no lack of thoughtfulness and fun spirit.

### **Day3 Reflection, July 1**

I had some interesting findings/experience today, and I am pretty excited about it. Let me just say a few of them.

#### **#1**

At the morning session, Dr. Ferree conducted two experiments on us to prove how the focus of a task can affect students' performance/perception. The outcome of the 2<sup>nd</sup> experiment was an amusing surprise to us, but Dr. Ferree seemed confused. The group on her right side was supposed to lost, but they still won. She claimed she gave this kind of workshops many times and had never got this kind of outcome.

I wonder if Dr. Ferree had ever conducted the same experiments on another group of Asian audience before, like Chinese or Korean. If the answer is yes, she probably wouldn't have felt too surprised today.

Before I state my assumption, I have to admit that age did play a big role on our performance. The average age of the two-time winning group is pretty much younger than ours, the losing side (all right, all right, I have to confess I contribute a lot to the sum of our ages).

Besides the factor of age, the result also involved socio-psychology and culture differences.

Dr. Ferree forgot her audience was a group of Chinese teachers, who were surly diligent and competitive students years ago. We had been trained to be sharp test takers under the Chinese education system. When challenge comes, the instinct is aroused. Thus, the performance may overrule the rule. The 1<sup>st</sup> time winning group was all alert for the 2<sup>nd</sup> experiment, especially when everybody could predict the rule would favor the other group this time.

The losing group thought they would win the second time easily because the rule was in their side this time. They took it easy and lost the game again.

I raised my hand, wishing I could comfort Dr. Ferree by telling her my assumption, but she didn't see me. She looked a little embarrassed and frustrated, and had decided to continue her presentation.

## **#2**

Dr. Tseng taught us Taiwanese language during her teaching demo this afternoon. Being one of the few Taiwanese speakers in class, I found I was in the same shoe of some of my students' – I am the native/heritage learner!!! It's such an unexpected yet interesting experience! I now know how my heritage/native students feel!

There are roughly two types of heritage/native learners in high schools. When I teach students something new (new to non-heritage but easy and daily to heritage), one kind of heritage/native learners look passive, indifferent and bored, while the other type of students respond as loudly and enthusiastically as all the non-native learners – sometimes even louder and more cheerful. Why are they so happy and all focused when they just mechanically saying "baba, mama...."? I wondered. My conclusion was that they were just being nice and respectful.

Today when I was in the classroom, I couldn't help it but chanted out loud with everybody else when Dr. Tseng cued us to repeat after her. "Zua di aobia...Qiugi di taojing." I found myself merrily saying these basic sentences when Prof. Tseng cued us to say. At the same time, I caught a glimpse of NaiChi. She was totally charmed, too. She did the same thing I did, and was as fanatic as me. I had to try hard not to say out loud the answer before everybody did. Poor NaiChi, one time she even let the words slipped out of her tongue before anybody else did, and she did that super loud and quick. Haha...

My findings about the instruction and the heritage learners are - -

1. When the instruction is efficient, students will "emotion subconsciously" saying what you want them to say, with the group. There is no way they can resist it, if they are focused.
2. As the extension of my first finding, the merrily-saying-out-loud heritage students are not only respectful, but also focused. They are so focused that they can't help it but just be elicited.
3. It takes efforts to control themselves not to say the answer before their classmates do. It takes extra consideration and maturity for a high school heritage student to give opportunities to their classmates. It's not easy. They have to try hard to keep quiet, which is against the nature call.
4. If the heritage learners say the desired word/expression louder and quicker than their classmates, don't think they are being naïve, cocky, or inconsiderate. Again, it's the nature call.

I am hopeless. It's 1:43 a.m. already. I haven't finished what I want to say, and I haven't done my other work.... I have to stop writing now, and save the rest for the other day.

## **Day4 Reflection, July 2**

I am still thinking of Prof. Tseng's Taiwanese demo yesterday. There was a little episode. When Prof. Tseng taught us right side and left side, she pointed at our right side saying "right side, and pointed our left side saying "left side. " I was worried the learners would get confused, but I didn't want to interrupt. The class was so high! Well, it did happen.

It happened-- because Prof. Tseng was so thoughtful. She wanted to make it easy for us- the students; while we, in our job as teachers, always do the same thing for our students. Therefore, we automatically took Dr. Tseng's right side as right, and her left as left.

One good intention + another good intention may result in an error.

However, the error was "warm" and "sweet"!

To be a good Chinese language teacher, it takes hard work, skills, family's support, determination, and something we call "Don Quixote's sprit". My belief is reassured by seeing Dr. Dali Tan, Dr. Tseng, and many teachers here. They are simply amazing!!!!

### **Day5 Reflection, July 3**

Today we had miniature teaching demos. It was the first time we applied what we had learned during the past few days in our teaching and presented in front of everybody. Many of us, including me, were pretty much stressed out. There are quite a few possible reasons: the pressure from the presentation, the accumulated tension due to daily assignments and lack of sleep, and, perhaps the efforts of trying to make effective communication and cooperation between members of a group. (My group worked pretty well though. The other two teachers tolerated me with a gentle way when sometimes I was being stubborn.)

Teamwork should be highly emphasized at this workshop. I am not only talking about the teamwork among the members of a group, but moreover, among the groups. It is because we are working toward the same goals. We want to complete this big task successfully; we want to make those young people learn as much as they can via our well planned lessons, and we hope this summer program will eventually leave something good about Chinese culture on their lives.

When our common big goals are achieved, the achievement of everybody's individual goals will come

To achieve the big goals, each group should do their best of course, and make sure the other groups also do the best they can. The first concept is, *the better you are, be better we (as whole) can achieve the goals.* Everything is my/our business. The second concept is *we will do our best to support you, and we believe you will do your best to support us.* Therefore, supply each other with our ideas/material before the field work, and the feedback/suggestions at the rehearsal are absolutely necessary and will be appreciated.

Ah, I am dying for internet access at the hotel. I could have done much more with efficiency.

### **Day10 Reflection, July 8**

Before I came here, I was like a big old spider, lived contently in the center of the web I wove. Being the solo Chinese teacher in the district, with a waiting list of young people who wants to do student-teaching with me, I somehow felt I was all set. Nobody doubted my authority.

After my first teaching task today, I felt very bad, not only because I let Tseng Laoshi down when those VIPs came to visit us, but also my pride and confidence were completely torn up. I realized I have been very much “teacher-centered” when I thought I was so much better than my English teachers in Taiwan.

The realization is good for me though. I am sorry for students I taught in the past years. I will definitely do some changes after I go back. Even though it means I will have to spend a lot of time re-designing my lesson plans and curriculum, I believe it is worthwhile. Hope it's not too late.

Besides the sadness, I also feel blessed. I appreciate Tseng Laoshi and Li Laoshi's guidance before the lesson, and feedback and encouragement after such a terrible lesson. The support and concern from everybody have warmed up my heart. Teachers like Chen Yan Laoshi gave me great materials and ideas. Xiao Jin Laoshi voluntarily gave me a ride to the classroom. The other teachers in the same ride took care some heavy stuff for me. They made sure I could run to the spot conveniently. Pingping Laoshi ran between buildings to get the printing job done for me. Hou Laoshi hold the big calendar for us so it wouldn't keep falling down during the class, and Xiaonan Laoshi dug out the tape and got the calendar fixed on time. When Grace and I were on the stage, my friends were there behind the stage, backing up for us.

When I shared what I felt with Grace, our eyes were filled with tears of gratitude. We are disappointed for what we performed, but we are not hurt and desperate because we know we are surrounded with friendship.