

Selected Daily Reflections

06/30/2009

Today is a really fruitful day for me. Not only did I get to talk to 17 excellent and experienced teachers, but also I systematically learned for the first time many important concepts in teaching, to name a few, 5C, OPI, -12 Performance Guidelines, Linguafolio and Backward Design.

What seems most helpful to me is 5C, namely, Communication, Culture, Connection, Comparison and Communities. In fact, this is what most teachers practise in class, even if they are not acquainted with this concept. Simple as it is, it may greatly facilitate creating lesson plans (useful in backward design) and ensuring an interactive class, especially for a new teacher like me. Often I have no idea about how to organize a class. With 5C in mind, four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) can be well-applied, and culture education can also be incorporated in class.

In addition, I notice that the use of good examples is significant in teaching. Take today's class for example. It can be really tough if we had been asked to memorize 5C. But things are different when we worked out exercises to differentiate 5C in groups. This too is something I can learn from Tsenglaoshi and Zhaolaoshi and implement accordingly in class.

07/01/2009

I like today's '5 children' of Communicative Approach. They provide a framework for meaning-based activity design. I especially like that story predicting game, in which we can design with comprehensible input and hidden grammatical agenda, and encourage critical thinking as well. I now look forward to re-reading Tsenglaoshi's book.

Apart from Zhaolaoshi's 'impressed-all' checklist, I am excited to get a good answer for corrective feedback today. I have always been confused about what to correct and what not to in class. Often I did not want to let go of errors, but did not want to interrupt the class flow at the same time. Zhaolaoshi and laoshimen's point that whether to correct the students on the spot depends on our teaching goal and the essence of the error (focus on meaning or form) is really inspiring to me.

07/02/2009

We all know that understanding individual differences is very important to classroom teaching. However, only till today did it occur to me that everyone can be a good language learner as long as the teacher is able to motivate them with the right approach. The '8 smarts' we learnt today presents a perfect picture of how we can take advantage of individual differences to enhance classroom teaching. I think class activities for the first two weeks are experimental, and can serve to help us get to know our students better (in terms of general intelligence, language aptitude, learning styles, personality, motivation and attitudes, and learner beliefs). Once we are clear about individual differences among our students, it'll be easier for us to arrange our class (i.e. whether to adopt ALM or CA, how to group in student-centered activities) effectively.

Zhaolaoshi's experimental exmples to demonstrate emotions strengthen memory are quite interesting and inspiring. We certainly know better when we take the standpoint as a student.

What's more, I realize warm-up exercises can set the tone for the entire class. Either a fun observation or a refreshing review that can arouse the students' appetite can be beneficial. This is something I need to work on.

07/03/2009

What I like about the two video clips:

Video 11: group the student of different levels and assign them with different tasks so that they won't feel bored while they are practicing the same patterns

Video 16: the students have formed the habits of going to the blackboard and practice writing characters before class. And they do dictions and peer editing themselves. In fact, cooperative learning is what benefits them the most.

Today I've learned a lot from Laoshimen:

I like Zhaolaoshi's hand motions like 'to complete the sentence'. They will help make immersion happen and let the students form a good habit in producing their utterances. It was fun to hear laoshimen's opinions on how to name the students. One inspiration that we can '中间字用辈分' is very interesting.

I like Tsenglaoshi's Southern Min teaching class so much. Now I can surely remember those words in Southern Min.

07/04/2009

Today is the day that I learn the most! I enjoyed every mini-teaching by laoshimen. Now we certainly know better how student-centered activities can enhance teaching in class. I believe nobody would forget ‘苹果被吃了’ and ‘我被打了’. And I especially like the activity by Huanglaoshi’s group (‘这.....是我的’) because it relates to students’ actual situations and would make the students want to get involved naturally. Meanwhile, I realize that teachers’ firm and clear instruction is crucial to the actual happening of group works and games. If not done meticulously, it will greatly affect the class flow and bring about problems like class management.

Teacher-fronted activities, on the other hand, are a must for the start of a thematic unit as well. In order to lay a solid language foundation for the students, pattern drill plays an important role. Drills, however, can be designed to be as meaning-based and communicative as possible. As long as teacher-fronted activities will not turn into a ‘teacher talk’ for most of the time, meaningful pattern drills are still needed in classroom settings.

Last but not least, Zhaolaoshi’s instructions on how to take advantage of the web resources are most appreciated!

07/05/2009

The 12 student-centered activities that Tsenglaoshi have introduced (information exchange, bingo, role play, inner circle outer circle, information gap, jigsaw, interview, survey, oral skit, debate, discussion and problem-solving) are such a good guide for teachers who are groping in the darkness to make an interactive class happen. Most of these activities can be applied to learners at both novice level and intermediate level. However, for novice level learners, input should be as simple as possible to get meanings across. Visual aids should be supplemented together with acquired words and patterns. Communicative activities like Information exchange, interview and debate would most probably be addressed to immediate level learners who are able to form longer and complete sentences. And before class preparation is very important. The instructors can distribute handouts so that the students can best practice their presentations the next day using the patterns.

Two activities impress me a lot: inner circle outer circle and information gap. I think inner circle outer circle is a brilliant idea to liven up the class atmosphere and make the students get to talk to more of their classmates and thus have more chance to listen and speak. Information gap, on the other hand, not only serves interpersonal communication purpose but also encourage critical thinking as the students are figuring out how to use certain expressions to make themselves understood. The later is such a good practice when we teach directions.