

Self Reflections

2011 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

Alice Lin

Day1 Reflection, June 21

Today is a wonderful day compared to yesterday. I had a good night's sleep so I was rejuvenated from yesterday's exultances. When I got up, I felt I was ready to learn.

In class, we reviewed a lot of old materials, such as 5 Cs, 3 modes, Backward Design, Use of Target Language (use 100 % Chinese to teach Chinese), Authentic Materials, and so on. However, I still learned something from reviewing the old materials when I examined my teaching to check if I applied these learned materials into my daily instructions.

As for the LinguaFolio, I think I can adapt it and design my learning objectives, teaching instructions, and learning activities, based on the student can-do statements.

We watched a DVD about a Spanish teacher and how he integrates the 5 Cs and 3 modes into his teaching. After watching the video, we discussed the strengths and weakness. We also watched my DVD from the Southern California Startalk Teacher Training Program. I am glad that I shared my teaching DVD with other teachers. I gained a lot feedback from my dear classmates and Dr. Tseng. I will implement the better and more appropriate activities that all of you suggested in my future teaching. Thanks to Dr. Tseng and all participating teachers in this program.

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Day 2 Reflection, June 22

Today's learning was beneficial even though most of the terms and

approaches are not new to me. Reviewing these materials helps me clear the gray areas. I have a better understanding about these theories and approaches now.

When we talked about Chomsky's Innatist perspectives, I remembered something that I learned in school. Although we did not talk much about him, I believe that adults learn foreign language in a different manner than how children acquire their native language. Cognitive theory predicts that an adult's second language learning will differ from that of a child learning their primary language. An adult learning a second language will pay more attention to grammar and sentence structure. Children have a special ability to generalize, create, and organize new vocabulary and utilize them into sentences that make sense to themselves when they acquire the first language. A silent period, when a language learner listens to native speakers for some time, is beneficial because they are totally emerged in the language. At this time, they can listen to how words are pronounced and listen to sentence patterns. The comprehensible input they receive should be both ordered and sequenced carefully to benefit the individual if they have a basic understanding of structures. I have a personal story related to this issue. I was born and raised in Ping Dong, Taiwan. The small town that I lived was full of KeJia Ren. I only spoke KeJia Hua when I was little. My cousin who was born and raised in Taipei only spoke Taiwanese. Unfortunately, his parents divorced so he had to come to live with his grandparents. In the first six months, all my neighbor's kids thought he was mute. However, he started talking all in KeJia Hua after six months. We were all impressed and amazed. I think those six months were his silent period.

In Krashen's theory, the input hypothesis suggests that a teacher should expose a student to language that is beyond their current level of understanding so that the student will acquire more language. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis says that affective conditions need to be optimal so that the comprehensible input can have its effect on acquisition. These optimal conditions include the learner being motivated, possessing self-confidence and self-image, and not having anxiety.

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Day 3 Reflection, June 23

A nice and cool day!

I really like how Ms. Pierce used the authentic materials in her classes. In her Chinese 1 class, she downloaded some short, effective, visual supported advertisement video clips from youtube to show her students. The first video clip is muted. After watching the video clip, every student needs to say something about the video clip in Chinese sentences and then create their own dialogue in pairs to present in class, or the individual student can do a narration along with the video. Another video clip that Ms. Pierce used is Kentucky Fried Chicken's TV commercial in Taiwan. She used this one to teach duplicative adjectives, such as 麻麻的, 辣辣的 and so on. These authentic material-used activities are student-centered and highly engaging for students. In her Chinese 3 and 4 combination class she also used video clips. One of the PSAs about environmental protection called 筷子(kuaizi, chopsticks) is very interesting and impressive. I enjoyed it very much. I think her students must have enjoyed it as well.

In addition to video clips Ms. Pierce also used many types of authentic materials, such as Chinese songs, books, and comics. I truly appreciate her sharing today.

We also reviewed Task-based Language Teaching. Although I and other two teachers from California had learned from Prof. Tseng about TBLT last month, I still gained a lot from today's lesson. I memorized the four features of authentic tasks which are MORE.

- M: primary focus on meaning
- O: clearly defined communicative outcomes
- R: self-determined language resources
- E: real-life experiences/situations

Now I can easily define which task is really authentic, and which is pedagogical.

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Day 4 Reflection, June 24

What a productive day!

In the morning, Zeng Laoshi taught us four types of Chinese learning devices. He's very knowledgeable about using various technological devices such as websites. However, I feel that I did not get a good understanding how to exactly use all of these different types of devices. I think that it would be most beneficial for us to learn things that we can apply the most, and rather being exposed to so many different types of options and methods, it would be better if we concentrated more on less methods. As a modification, it would be better if we went more in depth so we could have a better understanding on these methods and actually be able to apply them in practice. By going over four methods broadly, I felt that it was confusing and not that efficient, as I didn't get a good handle on the ideas that were presented. With this said though, the program GoChinese that he presented to us did seem like an extremely helpful website though. If we were to go over this website more, I feel that we can learn a lot from it. As for the other things, it would be better to focus on fewer methods, but really give us a better understanding about them so we can apply it in the classrooms.

In the afternoon, Ms. Helen Small came and taught us about TPR and TPRS. TPR uses total physical response as a teaching strategy. It leads student to learn by actively moving and can aid in learning action type vocabulary. A lot of language teachers use TPR as a teaching strategy to teach their students, and typically students really enjoy this method because they can engage with the language process really well.

TPRS is another teaching strategy. It stands for TPR story telling and hence focuses on reading and story telling. The benefits of this teaching strategy are that it focuses on meaning and doesn't focus on grammatical forms as much. In this method, teachers show and tell and read to their students. They use the structures in a story to help students understand by revising the story and intensifying language acquisition. Key concepts of this are that it relies on repetition. The goal is to provide as many forms of repetition as possible so the vocabulary and language structures can be fully internalized by students. The best input is context, compelling input, and

comprehensible input (CCI). The most powerful input is personalized questions and answers (PQA). I learned that ultimately, the key to successful teaching is using TPR, visuals, graduated questions, personalized questions, cooperatively created stories, and reading.

Learning about TPR and TPRS teaching strategy has had a strong and obvious impact on my learning and will enhance my subsequent teaching.

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June 30

Today was day 4 of practicum, and my group first time of teaching during these past two weeks. I was nervous before teaching because I was afraid of not preparing well enough, but once I got up in front of the students I wasn't nervous anymore because I felt like I had a good relationship with them. Yesterday during rehearsal, I created a song, but it wasn't that meaningful, and didn't really relate to the topic or students as much. Natasha, the co-trainer, said that I could create a song that was more applicable and meaningful. Since our lesson was hobbies, the day before yesterday I had already surveyed and asked the students what hobbies and activities they liked. As a result, I was able to incorporate what hobbies each student liked and incorporate their names with their respective interests. During the lesson, after students knowing how to name the activities, I showed the pictures of the activities and students raised their hand if they liked it. I asked them again what the pictures represented and they were able to tell and say a sentence of who likes the activity of the picture. Overall, I felt that the modification for the lesson was much better.

This whole last week we've been taking class and I understood Dr. Tseng's expectations really well. The goal of the practicum is to have more student-centered activities and less teacher-centered instruction time during the class period. From last week's training, I know that Dr. Tseng wants more student language output, which means that students should speak up more in class when they know how, rather than have the teacher say so much. The interaction between teacher and students or among students themselves should also be meaningful; non-meaningful exercises should be transformed

so that they become meaningful conversations. In today's teaching, I tried to apply these theories as much as possible into my lesson plan. However, there were a few criticisms that I gave myself, as I feel there is a lot of room to improve. For example, I feel that I should be more conscious of my hand gestures and make sure when students see me draw a question mark with my hand, it is facing the correct direction for them, instead of it being the correct direction for me.

After teaching, Dr. Tseng said that I had a lot of patience with the students. I hope that I really can keep this up and make each individual student be and feel successful and that I won't give up on any students. I hope that every student can learn the language well and have the opportunity to use what they have learned in real life situations. In the future when I create lesson plans, I want to make more authentic tasks so that they can use what they learn properly when they are faced with real life situations. While this may be a challenge for me, I feel that this is the best way to teach, and it is for the student's own good.

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July 2

Today was the second time our group taught. I was excited to teach the younger group because they're really eager to learn and are very active. I feel that their responses to lessons are always really positive. Today's topic was also a fun topic, and I was in charge of teaching the first section.

The topic of today was dining. I taught the first of three periods, and there was a lot to review and cover. I taught the names of the dishes in Chinese restaurants. Although best practice is to have more student-centered learning, I kind of had to cut down a little bit on it, because there was so much to cover. Aside from the dishes, I also had to cover the flavors used to describe these dishes. As a correction for future teaching, when I teach this same topic, I will spend more time on student-centered activities such as having students identify items and practice saying them out loud and describing them. I will apply best practice teaching methods and allow them more opportunities for language output.

When I did the role-play activity, I realized that it was still

teacher-centered. Next time I will make it more student-centered and let them pair-work. Since I acted as the waitress, it wasn't as student-centered as it could have been. Next time they can work on their own as a waiter/ waitress and the rest of them can work as customers to decide what they want to order. This modification can allow the students to determine their language resource and make the activity significantly more student-centered and can allow them much more language output. The way I did it today, didn't engage all of the students as well, since the only students that were really engaged were the students in the role play group. This new modification can involve more students to engage in discussion.

The greatest flaw today was that I felt that too much material was assigned to be taught in the first hour. It would have been much more effective if less material were required. This way I can also have more student-centered activities. By breaking up the teaching requirements, my teaching methods and the student's ability to learn would be optimized. Although there were a few aspects I wasn't too pleased with, the students seemed to have great time learning, and they seemed to learn a good amount. Seeing the students enjoying themselves made me happy, and let me still feel quite successful.

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July 7

My group was chosen to go on the last day of the practicum, which was today. The class setting was a bit different as they combined the two classes into one. My group did a final review, assigned a student performance, and a closing ceremony. At first I felt some pressure because all of the students were combined together and all of the teachers would be watching. But once I calmed down, I figured that if I planned ahead, it wouldn't be too bad. I first thought about the learning objectives of the past 8 practicum and thought about how I would measure the result of the students' learning. My group decided to assign a skit performance to measure students' learning. From my previous experience, I knew that I had to give the students enough time to prepare for the skit performance, so my group handed out instructions during a tutorial yesterday so they could start preparing for the next day. This preparation was done prior to the actual performance and I feel that it was well planned and students could be well prepared.

During today's practicum, during the first period we used about 25-30 minutes to do a quick review. My group modeled examples from what the students have learned and we also used a PowerPoint as another visual aid. The handout that we gave students yesterday for the skit contained clear instructions and three scenarios to perform. It also contained suggested vocabulary and sentence structures for each scenario. After the review session, students prepared their skits in groups and all of the teachers helped the students prepare their script. Teachers also helped students with pronunciation and sentence structure and were extremely helpful and cooperative. After the performances, there was a lot of positive feedback. There was a lot of language output and the performance today showed Dr. Tseng and all of us teachers how impressive the students were and how much they learned over the past nine days. I believe this was the result of all of the teachers' effort, and I really appreciate everyone's hard work.

After the practicum, I concluded that as long as teachers plan ahead and plan more student-centered activities over teacher-centered activities, we can usually expect student learning outcomes to be as great as they were today. In my future teaching after the summer, I will continue using the skills I learned in Virginia in my classroom. My goal is to use 100 percent Chinese in the classroom to create a complete immersive environment. I will also do my best to create meaningful and communicative interactions as well as authentic task-based instruction. One of the ways I plan on doing this is to use the textbook less than I use actual applicable examples and activities.

I really appreciate the Virginia Startalk program for this opportunity to help improve my teaching skills. I've learned a lot from different teachers, especially when it comes to their sharing of technological skills and websites. I really thank everyone in our learning community and Dr. Tseng and all of the teachers that assisted.