

6-26-12

Even though I have learned these theories and terms throughout different StarTalk workshops in the past, I felt today's review help clarify some concept that could be ambiguous or misleading. One good example is that standard 1.2-interpretive mode+ standard 1.3 –presentational mode does not equal to standard 1.1-interpersonal mode. Another one is the distinction between student-centered and teacher-centered teaching. The discussion is a good practice to examine your knowledge/idea in words. I valued the time that we had for small group discussions to share different idea and perspectives. That's the beauty of this type of workshop. You learn not only from the instructor, but also from your peers. It's very much like our high school classrooms. The opportunities that a teacher provides for students to learn from each other are as important as the instructor's direct teaching. In other words, it all comes back to the idea of rotation between teacher-centered and learned-centered activities.

Communicative approach is such a buzzword that I thought I understand. But again, through the analysis of examples, I felt that I can interpret it better.

I skimmed through chapters five and six about the activities and interaction among student-teacher and student-student. I think my pressing issue would be how to plan out questions to make them communicative and comprehensible for students. Another issue that I encounter in my teaching is how to teach vocabulary in a meaningful communicative authentic context. (p. 185). Even though I try to group vocabulary for better scaffolding there are functional words that are hard to put in context. Perhaps I do not plan well enough?

Throughout these two chapters, there are ample examples of the activities and the procedures for a communicative classroom. The invaluable information is as important as the summary of the key essence of communicative approach (pp. 138-142). I will definitely carefully read through them and implement these activities in my classroom.

6-27-12

The article "Epilogue: Implications for Teaching," gives a great summary of what we have covered today for the TBLT-Task Based Language Teaching. A successful communicative classroom needs to provide more meaningful and communicative input. Through careful scaffolding, students will be provided opportunities to produce meaning-based and communicative language. The last implication is probably most thought-provoking for me. Setting high expectation to challenge students could produce positive results of great

language acquisition. In the meanwhile, it can backfire too. I think it all comes down to how a teacher prepares for the students to reach the goal. If a teacher sets high expectation of students, she/he needs to know how to guide students to that goal.

One interesting viewpoint that I have heard of and mentioned in this article is that some believes that the initial stage of language learning should be comprehension-oriented; therefore, there will be a silent period at the initial stage. We should give students some time to feel comfortable before they talk. My question is how long the silent period should be. When should we start “forcing” students to produce when some students just refuse to step out of their comfort zone?

The idea of TBLT seems obvious. But as Dr. Tseng said in class today conceptual understanding is easy; while implementation takes lots of trial and errors. It is again very much like the student learning in our classroom. Input is only one part of the language learning, without interaction leading towards production, learning is not complete. In other words, there is always a big gap between perception and production. This is a real issue in many classrooms. To increase students’ proficiency level, frequent exposure to the target language and ample opportunities to practice and produce in communicative contexts are the golden rules.

Even though this section of TBLT is a review for me, the revisit of the material is the repeated exposure of the content that will solidify my understanding and hopefully I will be able to implement the idea of task-based activities more effectively.

6-30-12

Today is a true test of how we handle unpredictable situation. Without electricity, life still goes on. Therefore, if things are not under our control, just deal with it. There is no need to get upset or complain. It applies to our teaching, too. We always need a backup plan, just in case the original plan does not work out. That is probably why I don’t like to rely too much on technology for daily lesson delivery. Other than PPT, projector, document camera, microphone, I don’t use many tech tools in daily teaching. But it is always wonderful to know what’s going on in the field of technology. Today’s class gave me a peak of some many helpful tools that can help preparation a lot easier. Big thanks to Mr. Tseng and other teachers sharing information.

As for the afternoon session, it is always a good practice to see how other teachers deliver their lesson and understand the rationale behind it. Even though there was no electricity, the principal of delivering a good lesson should not be impacted. In fact, I think it was a good practice to not to use any technology.

Teacher's performance again reflects the fact that conceptual understanding is a lot easier than implementation. The concept of communicative practice needs many times of recycle so it could become second nature.

7-02-12

Reflection of my teaching practicum

Pre- Practicum

Our teaching team started right after we were assigned to be in the same group. We held several long meetings to go through the objectives and examining the concept of communicative practices and task-based activities to come up with the flow of the teaching for the entire unit. For every activity, we made sure every member understood the steps and the rationale behind the activities. It was definitely time consuming and it was exhausting sometimes when it was really late at night. But the exercise of examining the activities against theories, in my opinion, would pay off in the future.

I have to admit that putting together the PowerPoint is tedious and time consuming, especially putting pinyin and Chinese characters together. Cramming both pinyin and characters on the same slide could be visually fatiguing for students. Though awareness of Chinese characters in the beginning of the learning process is important, I have doubt that it is effective to provide pinyin AND characters to novice low students at such a short program. However, I also hesitate to the idea of possibly misleading students that pinyin is Chinese.

Practicum

Teaching on the second day of the practicum flew by really fast. Teaching while knowing every movement will be critiqued definitely is different from every day teaching in the classroom. It is mentally exhausting to walk on a tight rope one step at a time, taking conscious effort not to trip. I knew right away what I did not do right, including the scaffolding questions in warmup and the burst of English "anyone". Overall, the flow of the lesson was good, through careful scaffolding; students did learn how to exchange information of parents' occupation. The time control of the student centered activity was a bit sloppy, though. To improve, I would give a time limit to finish the task and follow by student presentation to wrap up the activity.

Though the lesson needs a bit twiggling, overall, I am happy with the outcome of the lesson. Big thanks to my wonderful teammates for great collaboration.

7-7-12

reflection of my teaching practicum

Second round of teaching practicum fell on a Saturday. The class was held in a regular classroom, which seemed to have a positive impact on the mood of the class. I felt more at ease, and the students also seemed more comfortable. This reminded me of the article about the observation of the classroom. To have a successful class, the classroom setting also plays a very important role. The conference room that we usually use for the class, though grand, does not simulate what high school and middle school students experience in their school life. Today's location provided a comfortable setting.

As for my teaching, I used communicative practices as warmup activities to review the materials of the previous lesson. I used questions such as "When (which hour) did you go to sleep?" "What would you like to do on the weekend?" Though these middle school students seemed to understand the questions, when replying back, some still copied what was on the PPT instead of using the correct time or person. This indicates that more practices are needed to help students solidify accurate language output.

The objective of the lesson was to use the accurate expressions when visiting a family and accepting gifts. Our group prepared a video to cover the lessons. I snap shot some images to create dialogue for PPT, but I did not cut the video in short segments, which I realized could have helped students easily comprehend the sequence/relationship of the correct expression (谁啊, 我是..., 请进,请进, 请坐,请坐,...etc.)

The student-centered activity of exchanging gifts was successful. Students had plenty of opportunities to practice the targeted expressions. Also, the usage of real objects made the activity more fun. For middle school students, candy can be an attractive hook for learning.

Overall, it was a successful lesson. Our team again collaborated and helped each other run through the activities. However, there are still some areas that I need to work on. Burst of English such as "OK, good, and oops" needs to be controlled. To use the instructional time more effectively, modeling needs to be precise before passing out handouts.

7-10-12

The third teaching practice went well thanks to the collaboration of six people in two groups. The theme of both classes is the same. It makes perfect sense to brainstorm together and find the best lesson flow plan. It reduced the work load for each person and students got to be exposed to the best activities for the targeted lesson.

The main objective of my part of teaching is ten colors and the usage of “or”- 还是. I used the clothes from the first period to link the lesson from clothing to colors. As a student-centered activity, I used jellybeans to hook students. Students were very excited that they got to eat while practicing their language. I could tell the students enjoyed learning this topic and they were very engaged. One major drawback of counting different colors of jellybeans was that I put too many jelly beans in a bag. It took students some time to count them one at a time. Some students separated them and counted in silence and just reported the total numbers of different colors of jellybeans. That did not serve the purpose of the activity. I corrected them while circulating to check their performance. Even though the activity took longer than I expected, the dynamics of the class proved that it was an excellent activity to engage students. I would cut down the numbers of jellybeans in the bag next time.

The very last activity was to dress up celebrities with cutout clothes. The objective of this activity is for students to work in pair and produce sentences to describe their choice with “or” structure and describe what people wear. I ran out of time to have students complete the task as a student-centered activity to conclude the lesson. I probably should have kept this activity because students showed great interest when I demonstrated the activity through document camera.

Overall, it was a good lesson. But I rushed through some vocabulary because of the time constraint. The ripple effect was that students would not be able to produce the expected outcome in the targeted time frame. In the end, I ended up wasting some time to slowly guiding students. Effective usage of every second of the instructional time remains a challenge. How to effectively pack so much new information in such a short period of time is a lesson that I will continue working on to benefit students.