

## Assignment 1 - Reflection and Highlight of Chapter 5 and 7

I have read Chapter 5 and 7 of the book. Below is a summary of the most inspiring content of the chapters, and how these theories and techniques would enrich my teaching skills when combined with today's workshop.

The book suggests that language acquisition and context should not be separated, because Communicative Approach emphasizes on three capabilities: expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning. A student can only become an independent life-long learner when equipped with these skills. However, the development of these skills would not be possible if learning is not based on contexts. The book also mentions the fact that the majority of Chinese native speakers do not understand too much Chinese grammar does not prevent them from being fluent in the language. This is such a simple and obvious observation, yet it is highly inspiring. This proves once again that fluency is not the result of grammar drill but from numerous practices in authentic contexts.

Based on the book and today's workshop, I come to the observation that Communicative Approach has brought along fundamental changes to roles of both teachers and students and setups of a language classroom. In terms of teachers, they need to transform from a front trainer to a facilitator. In my opinion, such a change in role also reflects a change of the teacher's mindset. For students, they need to transform from passive learners to proactive participant in the process of language acquisition or even during the selection of teaching materials. I think this is a result of the change of the teacher's mindset because s/he no longer considers himself/herself the authoritative figure of the class. As for activities, teacher-centered one-to-one Q&A will be replaced by student-centered group activities. In order to suite the new demands, the classroom setup will be changed from detached to authentic or near-authentic setup. From all these changes, I am able to see that another benefit of having a student-centered classroom is that classmates will eventually be able to correct each other, not only relieving the teacher's burden but also making the classroom a more efficient language learning environment.

I have learned a lot after studying the activities mentioned in the chapters and from watching the videos in today's workshop. And one thing that would always stay in my mind is that planning is the most important step in most student-centered activities. The book also helps me to realize that building a student-centered classroom does not mean to leave all the work to the students. Instead, the teacher is now responsible in planning the structure and details of the activities. Through examples, the book has shown me how much a difference would it make should planning is not carried out carefully.

Both the book and the workshop suggest the teachers to be flexible when it comes to situations such as deciding how many authentic materials to use, how much time should be spent on grammar explanation, and how much time should be spent on teacher-centered activities. I agree and I think the key here is to make a well-balanced judgment so that the "i+1" principal is observed and students' capability to communicate in unpredictable situations is trained.

Last but not least, the precise, clear, and right-on-the-spot writing style of the book is yet another aspect that inspires me. I like the fact that Dr. Tseng only includes the very essence of different scholars' thoughts in the book and then supports them with a lot of practical ideas. This book will become my latest source for ideas.

## Assignment 2 - Reflection and Highlight of "Epilogue: Implications for Teaching"

The most important change today's workshop and the article have brought to my teaching philosophy is the realization that learners in a successful language class don't focus on language itself; rather, they learn some kind of subject matter or other content through the second language (Van Patten, 103). My teaching style has been profoundly changed as a result of this enlightenment.

I have now embarked onto a self-criticizing journey to re-evaluate all the activities of my Chinese classes. Today's workshop and the article have shown me a set of guidelines to help me achieve this goal. The bottom line is that all activities should be meaning-based to qualify as acquisition-oriented, because input would not foster acquisition without a meaning goal and communicative intent – in the words of Van Patten, "learners should not spend their time producing utterances for the sake of producing utterances" (Van Patten, 109). Based on this observation, I reach the conclusion that teacher-student and student-student interactions should always be natural and meaning-based.

I used to group new vocabulary (those I think my student should understand) into various thematic packs before I present them to my students, without assigning further meaning-based activities utilizing these new words. From now on, I will be sure to attach activities that mimic real-life experiences and/or situations with informational goals to the new thematic vocabulary packs so that I can stop presenting the vocabulary for the sake of presenting them. Moreover, students' interests and needs will be considered to ensure the presence of student-determined language resources. All these guidelines will help me refine my activities, making sure that it is acquisition-oriented. Of course, I will also keep in mind that I should be realistic when setting goals, so that the "i+1" principle is observed.

The article has been extremely helpful. However, it does raise some questions. I especially need help on clarifying the following paragraph: "A focus on form should not take place in the absence of meaning. That is, a focus on form should happen in one of two ways: (1) through a communicative interchange or (2) through some kind of comprehension task" (Van Patten, 110).

### Assignment 3 - Reflection and Highlight of “如何从观摩课堂教学学习教学技巧” and “Brain and SLA” presentation

Liang’s article has proposed five areas to pay attention to when observing a class. They are: (1) teacher’s body language; (2) how does the teacher achieve the day's teaching goal; (3) time management skills; (4) teaching skills; and (5) teacher-student interactions. I agree with the author that the observer should arrive the classroom earlier to avoid interruption to the class, but more importantly, to learn more about the physical setup of the room and the student body of the class. This is because learning environment has a huge impact on learning and teaching, and students’ facial expression when they walk into the class to certain extent reveals their attitude towards the class and the teacher.

This article is more than just a checklist on what to look for when observing a class. To me, it has presented a lot of dos and don’ts when teaching a language class. In this assignment, I would like to talk about the ideas that are inspiring to me, which would help to improve my teaching skills.

In terms of a teacher’s body language, it is important to keep in mind that one’s attire says a lot of the person’s persona, and would directly influence students’ impression of him, which influences the effectiveness of classroom management. Liang also suggests that a teacher’s vivid facial expression could be used as a teaching tool which could facilitate learning. On the other hand, unnecessary gestures should be kept to minimum as it would be distracting.

In order to achieve the day’s teaching objectives, a teacher needs to have clear objectives, efficient teaching method, and well-designed assessments. In my opinion, one of the key factors to ensure successful output is a teacher’s capability to reshape input based on his students’ proficiency level, past knowledge, challenges, and even their ethnic backgrounds. And meaningful interactions at the beginning and end of the class could also be considered as assessments.

Last but not least, the quality of teacher-student interactions also shows how successful a class is. Based on my experience, the relationship between a teacher and his students should be respectful yet friendly. Respecting of each other is the foundation of successful classroom management and a friendly teacher is the key to better understanding and more vigorous meaning-based discussions.

#### **Reflection on “Brain and SLA” presentation:**

It is great to find out that emotions interfere with one’s learning and that people’s memory last much longer when it comes to positive things. As a result, I will try my best to create happy learning atmosphere that could make my students’ learning more efficient. And this newly designed learning environment will also be decorated with authentic materials and vocabulary. This is because of the research result, which proves that students are capable of picking up extra language information even without conscious efforts.

#### Assignment 4 – Reflection on Day 4’s learning

On June 22 we learned about Integrated Performance Assessments (IPA). After 3 practices with my group, I came to realize that it is very important to set an overarching theme before the design of the assessments. Such a theme helps to set a general guideline for the assessments, and it fits perfectly well into the backward design practice. And since IPA is highly task-oriented, a theme would help ensure each assessment brings students one step closer on accomplishing the task. For example, in the case of three authentic flyers of Chinese restaurants, one could set the overarching theme as birthday celebration, high school alumni reunion, company dinner, or any occasion that fits the context. With the theme set, the teacher can work backward and design the assessments for each communicative mode: interpretive, presentational, and interpersonal. This way, the teacher will be able to stay focused while designing and/or choosing activities.

Another thing I learned today is how to evaluate classroom activities. Activities could be graded according to how communicative they are. Starting from the top of the ladder are activities that are communicative, which promote the exchange of new information between participants. In the middle are those meaningful interactions, which reveal obvious facts. And at the bottom, there are mechanical drills that are neither meaningful nor communicative. The rules of evaluation are indeed quite simple. And I realize that it is not enough to have simply a student-centered classroom; instead, a classroom should be student-centered AND communicative. For example, a classroom where students help each other memorize vocabulary qualifies as a student-centered classroom, since classmates decide which word they want to test each other with. However, the activity is simply a meaningless mechanical drill, making the activity not communicative at all, and thus should be avoided. This example is indeed quite obvious. However, as I evaluate the classroom activities I employ, I realize that many of them are indeed mechanical drills, even though they might look fancy from outside. My fellow teachers, please try your best to avoid the so-called “Ikea mindset” when it comes to evaluating assessments, especially those designed by your own selves. Certain activities might have taken you a long time to plan and build, and they might look very pretty, but please keep asking yourself: are these assessments meaningful and communicative? If not, please redesign them. Don’t feel bad, you do NOT have to redo everything. Sometimes it might just take a few minor adjustments to do the magic.

## Assignment 5 – Reflection on Technology Workshop

Ma Hua and I hosted the technology workshop on Tuesday and Wednesday. I learned a few things from the preparation and the presentation of the materials.

First of all, it is very important to understand the needs and interest of the audience. The presenter should find out what interests the audience and what kind of skills they really want to learn about before the workshop starts, and prepare accordingly. This helps to make the workshop more interactive.

I was given the assignment to talk about how to use iPad to enhance learning, while Ma Hua to talk about online resources. A large chunk of my presentation was therefore set aside to showcase the function and ideas of iPad applications and how to utilize them. The ideas are all very useful. However, the presentation was highly “presenter-centered”. The major reason was that the iPad presentation did not match with the audience’s needs and interests. Only less than one-third of the participants this year own an iPad. As a result, using iPad to boost learning might not be their top priority. In contrast, over half of the participants brought their own iPad, and the iPad session received more positive reaction. This explains why this year’s iPad session did not turn out more well-received as last year’s, even though this year’s contents were much more useful and interesting than last year’s.

On Wednesday, I changed my strategy. I shifted my focus from iPad to PowerPoint Presentation techniques. In this session, I included some useful but not well-known tricks to help the audience create PPT presentations more efficiently. I also included a few hand-on sessions. These contents were selected based on my observations on what teachers need most help on over the past weeks. This time, the session was much more successful since there were more interactions between the audience and me. And the audience reacted to the hands-on assignments more excitedly because these skills are what they have been trying to acquire.

I think such an experience is valuable in two ways. First, I need to understand my audience better before trying to lecture them. Second, and more importantly, we should always try our best to get to know our students better as a Mandarin teacher. We can do a much better job when we know what interest our students, and what they think as useful skills.

## Assignment 6: self-reflections on my 1st teaching practicum

My first and second teaching practicums were both on the topic of Hobbies. I taught the first and third period of Changcheng Ban, while my partner Wei Yuan taught the second period. The first period did not go well, and there are a few things that could be improved.

The biggest issue of the first period was organization. Group members of both groups assigned for the topic met and discussed how the lesson should be taught. The overall structure was clear and well-planned, and there were plenty of student-centered activities for practices. The day would have been very smooth should my lessons were more organized. I printed out the activities and worksheets without making sure the instructions were clear enough for students. This had caused students to be unable to carry out the activities according to my plan. I could have solved this problem with clear demonstration/modeling. However, I did not do a good job on that either. This left my students confused, affecting their performance.

I would have caught this problem should I have left myself more time to rehearse before the lesson. I spent hours on preparing the PowerPoint presentations for both my group and the other group. Since I was the most technology-savvy person on both groups, I took everyone's requests on designing the slides. None of the slides was difficult to make, but preparing for almost a hundred of them was enough to take up a lot of time, leaving me little time to rehearse.

One thing I could do to improve the practicum is to number all the activities and include the numbers on the PPT slides. This way, I would know which worksheet I should be giving out as soon as I hit certain slide. Moreover, I should include clear instructions on the worksheets, and plan my demonstration well.

## Assignment 7: self-reflections on my 2nd teaching practicum

My second teaching practicum took place on the same day as my first one. As I mentioned before, the first one did not go well due to bad organization and lack of proper activity modeling.

Thanks to all the feedback from many teachers, they pointed out my mistakes and offered some solutions. I listened to them as I took notes. I spent the next hour quickly installed some improvements. And the third period became much better.

One of the things I was able to improve during that one hour of time was to number all three sets of worksheet I prepared. And I designed a detailed demonstration for each of the activities. As I ran through my PPT, I was able to fix a few careless mistakes that could lead to confusion.

Thanks to the fact that the lesson was indeed well-structured, nothing major needed to be changed. And I must say that Wei Yuan, my partner did a very good job on carrying out her part. She was able to recover my lost grounds as well as set up a great stage for me.

With all the improvements above, my Part II went much smoother. I was able to carry out all the activities as planned; the class proceeded with a satisfactory pace; and the atmosphere was more active as I became more relaxed and spent less time panicking.

One thing I could have done better was time management. I realized that I could have cut short one of the activities and allocated the time to another activity. I could tell that the students were getting bored by an activity, and I should have called it as soon as I saw the sign. Should I have done that, my last activity, the one the class enjoyed more, would have gotten more time.

## Assignment 8: self-reflections on my 3rd teaching practicum

My third teaching practicum was on Chinese Dishes and Tastes. I was responsible for the second part of the lesson for Gugong Ban. My major job is to review what have been taught during session 1 and build the stage for session 3, where all accumulated knowledge will be assessed.

Overall, the session went well. I did the following to ensure the class goes smoothly when I was preparing for the class. First of all, my partner and I designed a well-structured lesson plan with clear objectives for every session. After that, we each designed a series of activities for the sessions we were responsible for. I distributed my four activities evenly for the 50-minute session. Learning from last time's lesson, I numbered all the worksheets, stapled them into stacks, and distributed them right at the beginning of the class. And the PPT showed the activity number when it was time for a new round of conversation practice. This way, students knew which page to turn to. More importantly, the worksheets this time had very clear instructions, which prevented a lot of confusion. I also kept the PPT simple by getting rid of all the fancy animations. This helped to save time for more important things such as rehearsal and designing demonstration strategies.

I noticed that many students did not know what kind of sports I was talking about when I introduced authentic Chinese hobbies such as "ti jian zi" in the previous topic. And they simply told me they did not like it without thinking. So, this time, when I was introducing authentic Chinese dishes such as "tang cu yu", I purposely spent more time on explaining those dishes might be confusing. For example, I showed the students the major ingredients of "tang cu yu", which are sugar, vinegar, and fish during the presentation. And I could see their eyes brightened up as soon as they found out what made up of the orange fish on the PPT. I was able to feel that their answers became more personalized and emotionally connected when they used the dish again in later practices.

One thing I would like to improve on is the variety of the activities. It seems that two of my four activities were highly similar to each other, and similar to activities other teachers had been using too. They students were getting a little bored by such predictable activities by the end of the two-week camp. I hope that we would be able to figure out more interesting activities that are still communicative to spice up the classroom.