

## 2013 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

### Self-Reflection

#### Day 1: the article (Student-Centered Classroom) and today's class

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

Teaching methods and philosophies have changed over the years:

The old fashioned ideas that "Teachers are always right, do what teachers say; a teacher is the center of the classroom and he/she is the ONLY person who talks and provides all the information, and the students' job is ONLY to learn and do what the teacher says." ; BUT all those are no longer the facts nowadays.

As a modern teacher who is passionate and wants to provide the best knowledge and methods available to the students, a teacher has to read a lot of materials, go to a lot of trainings, classes, just to keep up with the students in the classroom and provide the best and the most efficient outcome as possible.

Having to learn music all my life, teaching choir for 4 years, and changing gears to teaching Chinese, which is a totally different way of learning, teaching and perspectives, I had a long way to go in order to learn on my own and from my own mistakes, to learn from trainings, classes and other teachers. That was not easy.

What I read was the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the article (page 25 and later) which was more focused on the activities and application that can be used as student-centered activities. I like the fact that it was a much easier and comfortable article to understand and digest for us as students.

From the article of the student-centered classroom, it reminded me that it is very important to give the students as much opportunities to practice speaking the target language as possible. In achieving that, teachers should NOT think only how to make it easier for ME to teach and with less trouble. Instead, they should be thinking of how/what to do so that the students can gain the most benefit from our class when they exit our classroom. Any activities can be student-centered, even the most boring grammar and vocabulary exercise can be student-centered with the teacher's proper design and thought put into the lesson plan design.

At the beginning of the class, two assistant teachers (who were in our shows last year as well) led the class by having a table of authentic objects and demonstrating how they wanted us to do it later on: By watching one of the assistant teachers recite the story related to the stuffed animal that she picked, we (the fellow students) got a better understanding of what's expected of us later. During each step of the activity, we were clearly given the period of time to do so, not only verbally (instructed by teacher), but also visually (by timers). At the end of each group presentation, there was a bell to let the student presenters know that time is up. By seeing the instructors' teaching model, I learned what to look for and what needs to be done if I am to plan my own lesson and teach my own lesson.

Tseng Laoshi's teaching/leading also was a model for us and showed us how we should lead our class when we get back to my own school and I lead my students: she has a very fast pace for the class, she involved the students into discussion a lot, she wrote down the notes on her notebook when there is anything that she needed to address later (like the questions the students had earlier and she needed to find the answers after class, etc..), she asks a lot of questions to challenge the students' answers to make sure that the students are really thinking instead of ONLY giving the answer "just because."

One of the most Ah-ha moments that I had today was that I had a clearer understanding of the 5Cs and can ACTUALLY recite the 5 Cs without seeing it. That's never happened before even though I have already taken classes/training of it prior to today. I never saw the importance of memorizing it. However, I learned that by knowing it by heart, I can identify which standard it is when I see the lesson plan or classes. Not only it will help me to identify other teachers' lessons, it will also be very useful/handy when I design my own lesson.

There was a lot of information gained today, and a lot of thoughts to be processed. However, with a happy and meaningful day behind me, I can say that it will be a very fulfilling and meaningful three weeks for the program even though it will be a VERY BUSY three weeks, and I am looking forward to gaining more information and different ideas that I can take back to share with my other Chinese teacher friends back in Dallas and for them to share with others as well for we are all life-long learners...

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### Self-Reflection

#### Day 2: the article (Epilogue: Implications for Teaching) and today's class

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

My reflection of today:

During class today, we were grouped according to the reading assignments, and we summarized what we had read to the other 4 teachers who had read the same article. Not only did we express to others what we learned, but we also learned from other teachers some ideas that we missed. Then we were divided into groups of 3 (jigsaw practice) in order to learn from other teachers who had different reading assignments. We then summarized to them what we had read (and what we learned from others earlier), then listened to and learned from other teachers about what they learned from their article. This kind of activity is a very good model for us to bring back to our own classrooms because the students can express what they learn/read in their joint assignments, and they can also share with each other things that they learn from their individual assignments: a very smart way of learning.

After the jigsaw activity and a discussion about the benefits of the activity, Tseng Laoshi then moved to the next topic: **Authentic Materials - Chinese Culture**. She explained what authentic materials are and what the advantages are of using authentic materials.

We also shared with each other our concerns, obstacles, and/or disadvantages that we might encounter when we work with authentic materials, and then Tseng Laoshi challenged us to find solutions (tips and principles) to the challenges that we might face.

In the class, there were two areas of confusion that were cleared up:

1. Some teachers asked if we can edit the original Chinese text if it's too difficult for our own students to read, but Tseng Laoshi said that it won't be authentic materials after all. Instead, we should "keep the authentic materials intact, (but ONLY) edit and revise the tasks, NOT the text".
2. During the discussion, Tseng Laoshi shared her personal experiences concerning the difficulties in using authentic materials: most teachers thought it was harder to find the authentic materials for the novice level or the advanced level, but from Tseng Laoshi and another teacher believed it was more difficult to find and apply authentic materials at the intermediate level.

We learned a lot of different activities for us to bring back to our own schools to implement, which will be very helpful. I also like that fact that Tseng Laoshi shared with us in detail how to use authentic materials appropriately in our lesson plans so that the students can best learn from the use of those authentic materials. And we not only learned to teach a variety of Chinese content by using many different activities, but we also were taught how to allocate the right

amount of time for the different activities. I especially like that fact that Tseng Laoshi used her own family photo and the video that she made herself to teach students the teaching key points and love the fact that she connect each steps/activities tightly and showed us different ways of teaching Chinese songs/music.

Two of my Ah-Ha moments in the class today were:

1. 老師要掌握時間，若有學生提出問題，可是不是教學重點的話，可以在下課前回答學生或下課後來找你回答。
2. 老師在課堂上的一個動作，說的一句話，都要有意義！老師是不能隨便亂說，亂做的。

Regarding the article that needed to be read today “**Epilogue: Implications for Teaching**”:

Unlike the article we read yesterday, it was difficult for me to understand. I didn't understand what the author tried to say at first, but with help from some of my classmates and the group discussion, I then had a better understanding of the article, but I still have some questions that need to be cleared up.

In the article, the author “posited five main implications of SLA research for the development of L2 curricula.” They are:

1. The more input, the better (The more meaning-based the class, the better);
2. The more interaction, the better;
3. All learner production should be meaning-based, or communicative;
4. Focus on form (or grammar instruction) should be meaning-based and tied to input or communication; and
5. We should watch out for what we expect of learners.

In my opinion, it all boils down to two words: Meaningful Application:

It doesn't matter what the teacher teaches or plans for the lesson today: if a student cannot apply (or learn how to apply) what he/she learns from the teacher, then it means the teacher won't succeed in the lesson today and the goal is lost.

At the end of the day, all teaching methods, all theories, and even all technologies, etc. only serve one goal: To help students learn more effectively and more efficiently. All teachers should remember that teaching techniques, technologies, etc. are simply tools to achieve a goal: better teaching and better learning.

## 2013 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

### Self-Reflection

#### **Day 3: the article (How to Learn Teaching Techniques from Classroom Observation) and today's class – how brain work with language**

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

My reflection of today:

At the beginning of class, I was first overwhelmed by all the neural terms and thought it would be pretty boring. However, as the time went by, I was surprised by how the brain and language are associated with each other, and I learned that knowing how the brain works can help Chinese teachers teach Chinese to non-heritage (L2) students faster and more efficiently.

The instructor first gave us some experiments to inspire us to learn how the brain functions by dividing the class into two groups and assigned each group a different tasks: one with a non-meaningful task (counting how many vowels in a word), and one with a meaningful task (associated with the positive or negative emotions we feel when we see the vocabulary), then the instructor asked us to write down the words that we remembered and the result was very interesting: the group that was assigned the task that was associated with emotion had more words memorized than the other group that had no-emotion connected with the task. This shocked me!!! I started to pay attention to how the brain functions and how I can take the knowledge I learned today and apply it to my class in the Fall this year.

The instructors gave different examples to show us how the brain works:

1. Showing a picture of many rectangles that stack up and seeing how many different rectangles we could recognize.
2. Showing a picture to see what images we could see in the picture: a young lady, an old lady or both.
3. Showing a picture with lots of black dots to see if we can see a dog there.

One of the Aha-Ha moments that I had was when the instructor said:

When our students hear us speak Chinese this Fall when school starts, their brains will be like what we saw earlier (couldn't see the dog via the black dots), AND it's the teacher's job to show the students where the dog is - to show the students the key points of learning Chinese.

Other information that I gained and felt helpful for me personally today were:

1. It is good to be multilingual: From research, it shows that it is good to learn more than one language - it is good for one's brain health.
2. The relationship between the learning age and languages: A baby is still a “Citizen of the World” at around the age of 7 months, but by the age of 11 months, a baby is the citizen of ONE single country; new born babies can hear any sounds, but when we get older, we hear less.
3. The right hemisphere plays an important role in language-elements of melody and emotion:  
Chinese is a tonal language so when a person speaks Chinese, he/she is using right hemisphere more than a person who speaks in English or other foreign languages.
4. Code Switching is used subconsciously for bilingual people. The more comprehension a person is for L2, the easier it becomes.

In the afternoon session, Comprehensible Input Strategies was introduced.

There are four Comprehensible input strategies can be used for classroom usage:

1. Body language, gestures, and facial expressions: TPRS is one of the samples.
2. Visual aids: photos, images, realia/concrete objects: it is good to use authentic material.
3. Language modification (左边高级一点, 右边简单一点): the teacher can use either an easier version or modification depending on the purpose and the student level.

Examples: 饮料: 喝的东西

食物: 吃的东西

有趣: 有意思

服装: 衣服

4. Contextual clues: 便宜/贵; 买/卖; 便宜/贵

We were assigned to groups and demonstrated how to teach the assigned task, then we were critiqued and were provided suggestions on how to improve our teaching skills in case we had a blind spot.

Regarding the article that needed to be read today “**How to Learn Teaching Techniques from Classroom Observation**”:

In this article, Ms. Liang points out the techniques/key points that a teacher should pay attention to when he/she observes another teachers’ class:

1. Teacher’s body language,
2. How the teacher tries to achieve the teaching objectives,
3. How the teacher controls the class time,
4. Teaching techniques, and
5. The interaction between teacher and students in the classroom.

Ms. Liang divides the observation into three time periods:

1. Before the observation:

\* Before observing a teacher's class, one should do some preparation not only in getting the information about the teacher's content area but also in learning some information of his students.

2. During the observation:

\* During the observation, the observer should arrive early and communicate/exchange with the teacher some ideas about the observation. During the observation, an observer should not only learn the content of the subject but also: how the teacher applies the content, how to make the transition smooth between each activity/objective, the interaction between the teacher and the students, classroom management, the pace of the instruction and time management, the physical environment and the teachers' physical and mental condition.

3. After the observation:

\* An observer should follow up with the classroom teacher after the observation, should note the pros and cons of the observation, should review those notes and should try to figure out how to improve the cons and change it to what he/she thinks is a better way according to the situation.

After reading this article, not only have I learned how to better observe another's' class, but I have also learned to pay attention to the many aspects of teaching that I didn't know of when other people come to observe my class.

As someone said earlier this week: Teach each class every day like it's a modeled class.

## 2013 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

### Self-Reflection

#### Day 5

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

My reflection of today:

Today was the first day that we started our first mini demo. Three teachers were assigned to a group. There was some confusion as to what the finished product should be, but overall, everyone did their best to prepare for their presentation.

Due to stage fright and nervousness, most of the teachers managed their time poorly or didn't perform as well as usual. I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. It is a good chance for us to ask ourselves again: is there anything more that I can do to improve my teaching skill? By having other teachers' points of view, it helped us to spot issues that we didn't see/notice.

The Ah-Ha moment that I had for the mini-demo session:

No one is 100% perfect, and there is always something that one can do to improve. I believe everyone spent a lot of time preparing for the 3 minute 20 seconds (ONLY) presentation, mostly thinking in their minds: what should be on the PPT, what should be taught, what activities should be used, etc... However, it is a process that is important for us to experience personally and to learn from directly.

The afternoon session was a technology session: there were a lot of technology options that were introduced. I already had experience with some of the websites/technology like [quizlet.com](http://quizlet.com), [dropbox.com](http://dropbox.com), NJStar, but had not used Palm before in class. With all the new technology constantly being introduced to teachers, it is very hard to keep up to date. I think all teachers should learn as many new methods as possible but use ONLY those that are a good fit for them and for their students according to their own needs and their school/classroom limitations.

For example: due to budget reasons, it is simply not possible for me to purchase a \$10 used Palm for each student to use, so I will pass on that one. On the other hand, the stroke orders for the vocabulary would be very useful for my students when they are learning how to write Chinese characters.

我今天的体会是：做什么或做的好不好都不是重点。重点是在这个过程中，我用心了吗？我学了什么？我是否在这个过程中帮了别人？还是我在这个过程中伤害了别人？我是否可以在我离开的时候，带着满满的感恩之心回家，并将我所学习的和别人分享等等。。。这些是我所要的。做学问(或工作)在人生过程之中不是最重要的。重要的是我是否做了一个人该做的事。学做(好)人才是我一辈子要修的功课!!!

很高兴有机会及缘分认识了大家，也很感谢所有的老师及同学们对我的帮助。。。老师们的苦口婆心就不用说了。吴老师今晚的芝麻面，我室友对我的包容，我队友的帮忙准备功课，Lu laoshi 的关心及她的救命热水。赵老师的谈心时间，还有其他老师们的任何一个随手帮助等等。。。真是太多要感谢的了。这些我都点点滴滴的放在心上。在夜深人静时想起来，都是满怀满心暖暖的。

最后要再一次的感谢曾老师的策划及教导，钟老师及许老师的示范及指导，还有各位老师们的加油及鼓励。。。

感恩你们！

## 2013 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

### Self-Reflection

#### Second Teaching Practicum

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

**Reflect upon your experiences in your first teaching practicum in one or all of three phases: pre-practicum, during-practicum, and after-practicum.**

After my first teaching practicum with the Time and Dates topic, I thought I did OK. Of course, there were some mistakes made and some areas that I need to work on.

However, when I was working on the lesson plan and the PPT, I didn't have a really good idea of how to choose from the many ideas I had. None really seemed like a great idea. I was checking on the previous classes to see what they did and why they did it that way. I also spent a lot of time making the PPT slides. However, two days before the real class, I realized that what I did (with the whole day of work) didn't fit into my lesson that day. With what I learned from the training a week ago, I immediately changed my plan, and started a new strategy. I did not destroy or delete any of the PPT slides that I made (they are still good materials, but NOT for this particular class), and I will use them later when I introduce new vocabulary, instead of reviewing the vocabulary they learned.

I started to think, OK, we need to have the end goal in mind, so what's my end goal? I decided to make a skit and let the students perform the skit that I wrote (my end goal). All the dialogues I wrote, I fit into the lessons that the students had learned for the past five days, which I learned also. I gave the students just enough for them to learn well, instead of giving them too much.

After the dialogues were done, I then designed the PPT slides according to the dialogue with logic and sequence. During the making of the PPT, I was still fixing the dialogue to make sure it went smoothly and logically. I also designed a project introduction letter to students so that they knew what they needed to do.

Of course, all those did not happen BEFORE my 10 minute rehearsal. I was still a bit confused as to what I should teach the class and how. As a result, I had a bad rehearsal (I think), and was disappointed in myself. I decided on my end goal, and started to write the skit and to make a new PPT, and I was much happier.

The night before in the lobby, I asked some of the teachers to be the actors/actresses in my new movie. We had fun filming it, and it released a lot of my stress in preparing the lesson - much more than in my real class back home. I am thankful for the support of my teammates and fellow teachers. They were very supportive and jumped in to help me film the video. During the filming of the movie, I had to change some wording and correct the script, but I was happy it finally was done.

Back in my room, I spent a lot of time editing the film and fixing the PPT to make sure that it went smoothly.

And with less than 4 hours sleep, it was show time. The good part is: I was not the first one to teach anymore. Yeah! I had two more hours to prepare, editing my PPT according to other teachers' lessons before me (as needed), to run the lesson through in my mind, and to calm my nerves before it was my turn.

I went up there and taught the class. I thought I was better organized and my mind was clearer regarding the process and the steps. Of course, I had a note card in my hand at the beginning and checked on it multiple times to make sure I was following it. After a while, I found that I had more confidence, and I even put the note card away and began teaching without it.

Again, I ran out of time. I still had not gotten the hang of teaching at a faster pace. I taught it the way I would teach my own class since the whole unit will be taught in about 4 weeks instead of 3 hours. However, this taught me that I need to really pace myself better when I am back in my own class so that I can keep up with the time frame and follow the lesson plan each day of what I want to teach the students instead of wasting their time doing what's not necessary. We ended up not doing the skit and not showing them the video. I was sad that I could not show them how well the other teachers did, but I think the most important part for me was to show them the work that we all did, and the help and support from other teachers when making the film.

Some teachers told me that I did well afterwards; better than the first time. I thought so, too. Of course, with lots of flaws to be fixed and improvements to be made.

However, I am happy with the growth that I have experienced while preparing for this lesson plan/class. This is the first time that I really used backward design and was the beginning of my better teaching career... a more efficient and updated version of me as a teacher. I will remember this moment for a long time.

P.S. After editing the film of my teaching, I saw I missed a lot of teachable moments and a lot of places that I would think: I should teach more of... or in depth of... It is good to watch myself and to know that I can critique myself because in that way I can improve as a teacher every day.

## 2013 Virginia STARTALK Chinese Teacher Academy

### Self-Reflection

#### Third Teaching Practicum

by

Meiyao Wu-Gilbertson

**Reflect upon your experiences in your first teaching practicum in one or all of three phases: pre-practicum, during-practicum, and after-practicum.**

Right after the 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching practicum, I started to work on the lesson plan for the third teaching practicum. Because I completed and demonstrated the PPT in about 3 minutes, I thought it was easier than either the first or the second practicum. However....

#### **I was wrong.**

I had some ideas about how to teach the weather topic and what to include in that. However, after my 10 minutes of demonstration teaching in front of everyone, I totally lost my confidence. My own high expectations had tricked me, yet AGAIN.

So I stayed at school and worked till around 8 PM (not the first time), then went back to the hotel, put down my stuff and washed up, and then went down to the cafeteria and worked with Hsu Laoshi asking for her input.

She gave me some advice about activities and some ideas about what to include in my class and how to teach it the next day. I went back to my hotel room and went to work. I reviewed the PPT, edited some new material and re-organized the order of the PPT according to the agenda and order of the lesson – another late night!

When one of my teammates taught, I went over the PPT again to run through the teaching procedure again and did the final editing. I was still nervous and didn't know whether or not I could do a good job of delivering the best quality of teaching to the students I was teaching today. Finally, it was my turn to start the class. Once the class started and with the students present, I felt a bit more comfortable and started to enjoy teaching the students.

However, I don't know why, I didn't feel my mind was as clear as when I was teaching the 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching practicum. I didn't follow the sequence of teaching procedure (which was how I created my PPT): adding up the different levels of sentence structure and content learning, etc.

Also, since it was the last practicum, I was more relaxed, which showed in the interaction between the students and me. It might be good when I teach my own lessons, but it could also be bad that I tend to joke more than necessary during class.

What I need to work on:

1. Planning the lesson according to a final goal - with the end in mind. I don't think I planned the 3<sup>rd</sup> practicum as well as I did the 2<sup>nd</sup> practicum.
2. Plan the time well – good time management: during each practicum, I tended to focus/teach/review too much of the beginning and either went over time and/or missed teaching an entire part of the lesson.
3. Organize my thoughts for teaching: I have noticed that I tend to jump around when I teach, and this will ruin my train of thought and make me forget where I was.
4. Holding the students' attention: I know I can keep the students' attention for a short time with my “crazy” teaching style. However, with a good lesson plan and procedure, I can hold their attention a lot longer in order to make sure they learn the most in my class with the best results.

I have now completed each practicum. During each of the three, I have progressed from having no idea whether I was on the right path to now having some idea of what I am doing and how I am going to do when I am back in my own classroom. It has been a long, difficult journey. However, during these past weeks, I felt I was “Like a butterfly came out from a cocoon”. Even though it was very hard during process, but I felt I was new born in how I see things regarding teaching Chinese.

Of course, what I have now is not only an idea (the result of most my training), but with some practicum knowledge and some real life experience. However, this is not the end of my teaching and learning journey. My next step, of course, is to take what I have learned over these past weeks back to my own classroom, and then experiment with it, practice with it and do the best I can with it. In other words, I need to put it to use in real life and learn from my own mistakes so I can find the best methods that fit my students' needs and my own teaching style.