

University of Virginia Star Talk Chinese Teacher Academy

Yan Xie

Self-reflection 1

According to Van Pattern, there are five principles to apply the theory of communicative language teaching. The five implication principles are 1) meaning-based class, 2) more interaction, 3) meaning-based output, 4) meaning-based grammar instruction, and 5) level appropriate goals. These principles emphasize meaning. Input, output, and interaction all need to be meaningful. Meaningful input makes meaning-based class happen, in which more interaction opportunities are provided and students are able to produce meaning-based output. Meaning is even the principle of grammar instruction. Traditionally, grammar is form-focused. However, embedding grammar teaching in meaningful context makes grammar learning more effective. Last but not least, level appropriate goals are critical because output is impossible if goals are not realistic.

Obviously, principles 1 through 3 are interrelated. Instructors should first provide meaningful input in order to ensure the occurrence of interaction and elicit meaning-based output. In today's workshop, the demonstration is exemplary in how to use authentic materials to provide meaning-based input, interaction and output. The long Chinese song "my Chinese is not good" was divided into 6 parts for learners to listen and figure out meaning, instead of being given away all for once. After listening to each part, students put the lyrics in right order, and then answer level appropriate questions which are all of personal interest.

The suggested principles are a guideline for all levels. I believe different instructors will have specific implication regarding levels.

Reference:

Patten, V. (2002). From input to output: A teacher's guide to second language acquisition.

Self-reflection 2

Today is another rewarding day. There are three spots of light in the workshop, each of which will more or less change my teaching.

IPA (integrated performance assessment)

Through the training, I know more about IAP which consists of interpretative, interpersonal, and presentational assessment. After watching and using the materials provided by Prof. Tseng, I am more positive with using authentic materials to conduct IPA. I learned the skills to create level appropriate questions to support students' understanding of the materials, to provide students group work chance to improve their understanding by learning from each other, and finalize the presentational work. Using IPA mode, we make student more confident with presenting their finalized product because confidence

has been fairly built up through completing interpretive and interpersonal tasks. However, presentational can also proceed interpersonal task, depending on task, time availability and class size. Professor Tseng shared many authentic materials, including videos and pictures, which she generously gave us permission to use and so saved us a LOT of searching time.

Strategies of correction

This part of the workshop allowed me to review the six correction strategies. Through reviewing the examples of each strategy, I think most time in the future I will use the strategy of recast, eliciting, and clarification. These strategies support the goal of using target language to teach.

Teaching grammar through communicative and authentic context

This component of the workshop introduced three elicitation techniques (mechanical, meaningful, and communicative), and distinguished “meaningful” from “communicative”. The former is generally witnessed in tasks with predictable answers, and the latter with unpredictable answers. To know the feature of “communicative”, we can easily recall that many student-centered activities frequently used by teachers are actually not communicative because answers were already prescribed. Communicative mode is more associated with emotional connection, and so is what teachers should use as much as possible.

Self-reflection 3

The article of Hsin-hsin Liang (2008) displayed valuable teaching techniques by providing a guideline for classroom observation. The parts of comprehensible input and teacher-students interaction deserve full attention of language instructors. Chinese is a less commonly taught language in America for different reasons, one of which is its high difficulty level. Comprehensible Chinese input demands a lot of preparations of teachers.

Keeping this in mind, Chinese instructors must be very clear of students’ current strengths and weaknesses. Only with this knowledge, are they able to bring in “i+1” input to class.

Teacher-students interaction can be influenced by language and non-language factors. Besides the aforementioned comprehensible input, another important language factor is questioning strategy. The author lists multiple choices for audiences to consider, but does not provide suggestion. I would answer one of them: to give question first or call students’ name first. I think it is better to give off questions first. All students would go to try when they don’t know who will be called. However, only that student called would try if others know this is not their job (even though you do not mean this). Non-language factors are relatively less discussed in opposition to language factors. Maybe for this reason, they are more likely to be ignored. However, non-language factors play a critical role. If used appropriately, your gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and speaking tones can make a big difference in your interaction with students.

In today’s workshop, Professor Tseng encouraged us to speak 100% Chinese to explain activity instructions. The demonstrating groups used comprehensible input (language) and appropriate gestures

(non-language) to achieve this goal. I would love to encourage myself and all peers to bring this practice to our own classroom. Going back to the morning presentation, Dr. Feree elaborated from the perspective of brain science that comprehensible input is emotionally connected, which suggested the significance of selecting contents of students' personal interest. Without doubt, comprehensible input, teacher-students interaction, and emotionally connected learning experience are critical for Chinese language teachers to teach successfully.

Reference:

Liang, Hsin-hsin. (2008). How to learn teaching techniques from classroom observation. *JCLTA* 43(1), 1-16.

Self-reflection 4

Self-reflections on my first teaching practicum

Pre-practicum

I taught "occupations of family members" in the third period. Preparing this lesson took me numerous hours. Although I have taught this lesson at Liberty University three times, it is like I am teaching the lesson for the first time. Many new interests are considered, primarily the standards, which I have not considered so much as this time. When I finished the lesson plan, I went back to check if all three communicative modes were included. I found "interpretive" was not. Therefore I inserted an activity wherein the students could do three tasks: listen to my narration about my family and fill in the blanks; check answers with a classmate; introduce my family to the class. Although this activity was dropped off because time was insufficient, I could better measure the weight of "communication" in my teaching.

Culture:

In the day of rehearsal, the PPTs for "dà" (big), "zhōng" (middle), and "xiǎo" (small) were three tomatoes of big, middle and small size respectively. Just before the rehearsal, I felt a Chinese style home image was better, so I tried to find a picture of "sìhéyuàn" which was pertinent to the theme of "family". I couldn't find an appropriate picture and so I went to find a Chinese dish. The motive was to embrace the "culture" standard in my lesson. Finally, the PPT seen in the rehearsal appeared to be three plates of "mápó dòufǔ". Dr. Tseng commented that a dish had no relation to people and so was not a good input. Such simple and short comment was very insightful as Chinese idiom called "yìzhēnjiàn xuè". This feedback clearly justified that "culture" standard is to serve language learning. Departing from the ultimate goal of language proficiency, there is no way to correctly address "culture" standard.

Authentic material

In this lesson, an option of authentic material is instructor's family picture. I have one family picture which was taken in my childhood. I took it down from the wall of my family's living room, and

scanned it to be saved in my computer. Finally this picture appeared in my PPT. Looking at this picture on the PPT, I felt a sense of achievement. Going back to my teaching before, I would not let such trivial work to “steal” time from my tight schedule. However, I now have a different attitude toward using authentic materials, and so am more willing to sacrifice my time to seek them.

PPT as a communication platform

Since no English can come out of my mouth, I did have to depend on PPT tool as an important communication platform. Furthermore, no English can show on PPT, so I tried to ensure that each needed input was given and any confusing input was avoided. This was specifically true with our students of no Chinese background. Keeping this in my mind, I made my efforts to put but only put what is needed on the ppt. However, in spite of this, one slide was still missed (see “After practicum”).

Peer learning

It is a rewarding experience to work with Zhōnglǎoshī . She was insightful and helped me to polish the lesson. I appreciated her valuable feedback. She even didn’t spare her effort and time to enhance one picture in my PPT. I used a picture of a teacher teaching in a class. To replace her face with mine, I used my head shot to cover hers. But I couldn’t perfectly cut off the edge, and so the “cooking up” was quite visible. Zhōnglǎoshī asked me to send this shot to her and she tried a while to edit it. Although she couldn’t, the next morning when we walked together to the class, she talked about it again and encouraged me to try again on my own computer. As a teacher myself, I definitely know how much such work ethics mean to students, and teacher self.

During practicum

The class was very smooth, and the students could introduce their family in terms of occupation. I was impressed when they used Chinese they learned in the two days to introduce themselves and their family. I was satisfied with them and myself. The objective of this class was fulfilled.

I designed four activities. Activity one was a meaningful one in which each student was assigned an occupation and a pair of students interviewed each other to find his/hers. In activity two, the students interviewed each other to find their parents’ occupation, the data I collected the day before and provided vocabulary for them on a worksheet. This activity engaged in the reality of students’ family. Activity three was cut off due to time limit. If it was done, the students would listen to my narration about my family members (authentic materials) and answer questions. In the end of the class, the students form an imagined family and discussed the role they want to play (father, mother, sister....) and an occupation they want to have. After discussion, they came to present their family to the class.

However, the classroom teaching revealed some details which I would never see if I didn’t teach. I found the image of “lawyer” was not 100% clear to a couple of students. I would replace this picture with a more explicit one. One student did not capture the meaning of “zhōngxuéshēng “ (middle/high student). I asked him if he is a middle/high school student, and he answered he is not. I asked again he answered the same. I turned to two other students to model and came back to him. He still answered

“wǒbúshìzhōngxuéshēng” (I am not a middle/high student). Zhōng lǎoshī hinted that I asked him if he is college student. I asked him and he said he is not. Then I asked him if he is an elementary school student. He said he is not. Therefore I said “you are a middle/high school student”. I appreciated Zhōng lǎoshī ‘s strategy which kept me following “only Chinese” rule.

The pronunciation of “lǔ” in “lǔshī (lawyer)” is hard for Americans to speak. I passed a couple of mistakes. These high school students came to the class with no Chinese background. Correction of pronunciation was critical because the pronunciation they learned in the very beginning is going to be internalized.

After practicum

After teaching, Zhōng lǎoshī and Dr. Tseng provided valuable feedback. Zhōng Lǎoshī pointed that I could ask the students to do more “solo” when teaching new vocabulary and sentence patterns. She also asked me to put the sentence patterns on the slide when I let the students do the interview. This slide was missed because I thought they would have no difficulty in doing the dialogue since they had practiced a lot. She also suggested that I go to listen to all the students when they did group work so that I could find errors and correct them immediately. I just listened to and corrected those sitting in the first row. One more thing she would like me to change was to change students’ seats before the class so that they could talk with other classmates. Dr. Tseng reminded me to give a modeling before the students started group work. Worksheet cannot save modeling. I didn’t model because I thought the worksheet was sufficient.

I invested numerous hours to prepare this lesson. Through the practicum, I totally agree that no matter how much effort I have made in preparation, the best method to test my lesson plan is to teach it. This teaching practicum was a super opportunity that polished my skills of planning and teaching lessons and enhanced my monitoring of my professionalism as a Chinese instructor.

Self-reflection 5

Self-reflections on the second teaching practicum

Before practicum

Before the teaching, I benefited from the feedback of Dr. Tseng. She pointed out the questions below were mechanical and should be avoided:

- A. “nǐxiǎng qù nǎr? (where do you want to go)”
- B. “wǒxiǎngqù chángchéng /gùgōng/tiāntǎn...(I want to go to the Great Wall/Forbidden City/the temple of heaven..)

B answered the questions according to the provided pictures of scenic spots. The answers were already assigned. Dr. Tseng assured us that mechanical drilling was not effective to the proficiency development . I deleted the questions and changed them to “nǐ xiǎng qù chángchéng/gùgōng /tiāntán /... ma ? (Do you want to go to the Great Wall/the Forbidden City/ the Temple of Heaven/...).

I also taught “xiān ...zài ...(first ...then...)”. I had thought a lot about the teaching of this pattern. I wanted to first asked the students the time of the current moment, and then I typed time and following that I did an action. Then I asked the time again and typed the new time and did another action. After time and action were presented, the sentence pattern was introduced as “xiān action A, zài action B”. Dr. Tseng insightfully pointed out that this would predispose the students to think this pattern is only used for completed action! I talked with Dr .Tseng and was assured that time was not necessary because her experience proved that only actions were enough for learners to understand the pattern.

One classmate felt that I seemed jumping from travel planning to hobbies when I went to teach “xiān...zài ...”. Therefore I deleted the actions of hobbies but adopted the actions of “going to a scenic spot to introduce “xiān ...zài”. IN this way, the students talked about where they wanted to go first and send immediately after they talked about where they wanted to go. This transition was very natural.

The day before the students took my class, I did a survey to find out two things they wanted to do on the coming Sunday. The activities they provided in the survey were all learned except for “go to church” and “to ride bicycle”. This data was what I will use in activity four of tomorrow’s class for them to discuss what they will do first and what second.

During practicum

The class was smooth and the learning objectives were fulfilled. During teaching, I kept in my mind the feedback which I got from Dr. Tseng and Zhong Laoshi in the first teaching, which included “to do modeling”, “to correct mistakes” and “to speak with more energy” .

If I could teach this class again, I would speed up the pace of teacher-students interaction but saved more time to the student(s)-students(s) communicative activities. If so, the students could interview more classmates about what they wanted to do first and second on the coming Sunday. In one word, they could have spoken more if they had more time to do the interview.

After practicum

I appreciated the way that I rehearsed and was observed because the audiences could find my weaknesses which I otherwise could not. I hope in the third teaching I could improve by appropriately assigning the time to teach step of the teaching.

Self-reflection 6

Self-reflection on my third teaching practicum

Before practicum

The rehearsal before the teaching was a rewarding experience. Peer teachers suggested I teach “to wear” before teaching the vocabulary of clothing. The reason is that I can teach the vocabulary by

using “to wear” in sentences to practice the vocabulary of clothing. This was the way of last year. When I was preparing for this lesson, I had tried to decide which one was the first, and finally decided to teach vocabulary of clothing first. The basic reason was I can still initiate communication with students by using the verbs and/or adjectives they have learned, for example, xǐhuān, yǒu, piàoliàng, dà, etc.

In the rehearsal when teaching “T xùshān (T shirt)”, I had asked the “students” the question “Lǎoshīde T xùshān piàoliàngma? (Is the teacher’s T shirt pretty?). One peer teacher commented that “pretty” was normally not a word used with T shirt and suggested me save “pretty” for “skirt”. I was not understanding why she didn’t think “pretty” is not used for T shirt. I was also surprised that nobody said “no” to her.

I was suggested to give each student authentic clothing when they practice asking and answering each other “how many of xxx(T shirt, skirt, pants, shoes ..ect) do you have?”. I loved this idea so much. However, the night before the class, I felt that logistically I cannot give each student a number of each of the 8 items: t shirt, shirt, pants, shorts, long skirt, short skirt, shoes and socks. When they practiced measure word by asking each other “how many of t shirt/skirt/.... do you have?”, they had fewer chances to practice “I have t shirt/ shirt/skirt/... because sometime they had to answer “I don’t have ...” because they didn’t get it from me. If I used pictures, I could give them each item of different number, from 1 to 10. Therefore, I downloaded pictures and asked Qinyin Chen to make copies for me. She gratefully did all photocopying at late night. Another reason that I gave up authentic clothing here was that I still have authentic clothing in activity three when they checked what and how many clothing items are in my suitcase.

During practicum

I taught “to wear” in the first place, although I was still confident that teaching clothing vocabulary in the first place could work the same well. But I just loved to try others’ ideas. If I didn’t try, I would never know how it could work. In the beginning the students had difficulty catching “to wear” and the vocabulary of clothing simultaneously. However, after repeatedly practicing “to wear” with different clothing, they started to have easier time.

As aforementioned, I changed to use pictures instead of real clothing during my teaching of measure words. Now I am going to compare the two methods. The pictures enabled each student to practice each measure word with each clothing item. If they talked about the authentic clothing, they would not practice so adequately due to that they couldn’t get so many clothing items. However, I assumed if they practiced based on the authentic materials, they could be more spirited. In another word, they were more motivated. If I could teach again, I would try authentic materials. I am interested in motivation research, and motivation is one of my priorities in choosing teaching materials. Now I realized my choice of pictures was mostly the result of the consideration of output quantity. Clearly I have raised a question: quantity of output or enthusiasm during output. For these 9 day intensive students, they must have been tired by today (the 7th day). They were not spirited so need to be spirited.

After practicum

After the class, Xu laoshi gave me the feedback. She encouraged me to do more student-student pair work, and reminded me to avoid overlapping speaking with the students. I felt I knew what she said very well. This is true when we are teaching, we are very likely to ignore some details even the important ones.

Through the 3rd teaching practicum, I got one more opportunity to practice my teaching skills and monitor my teaching through others' critiques and my own reflections. I wish all lessons learned will benefit my teaching at Liberty University.